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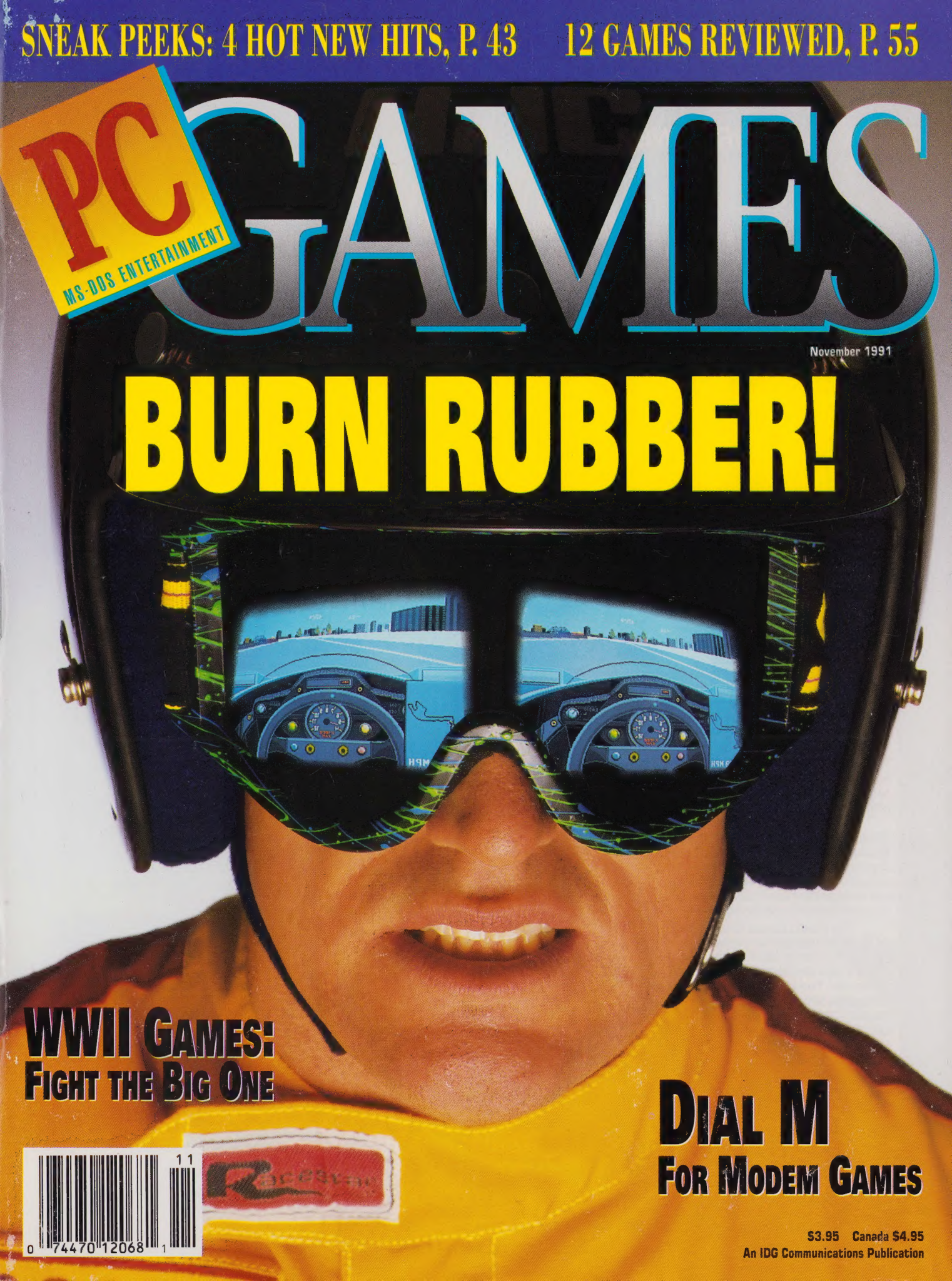

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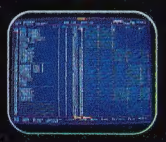

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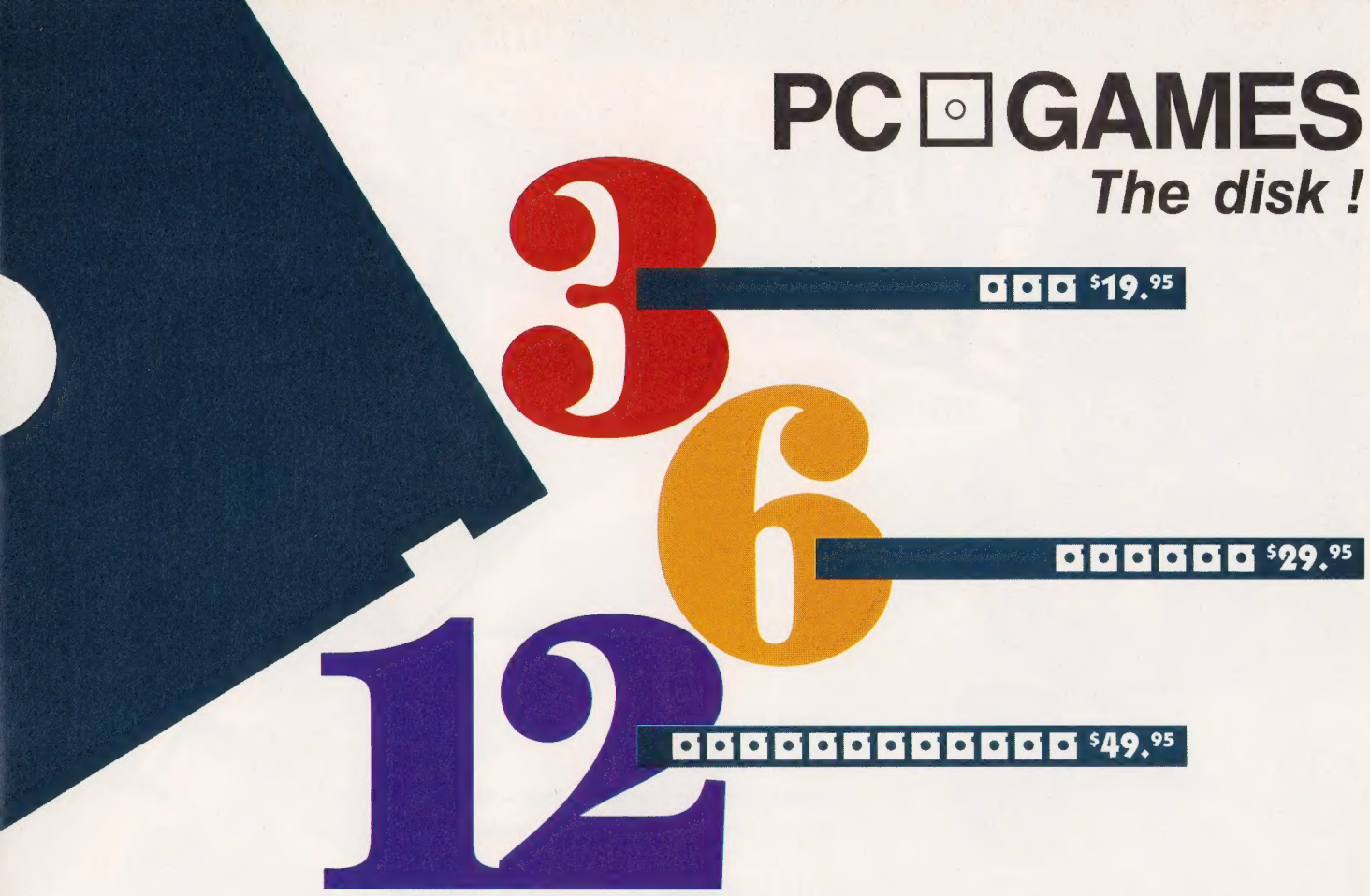

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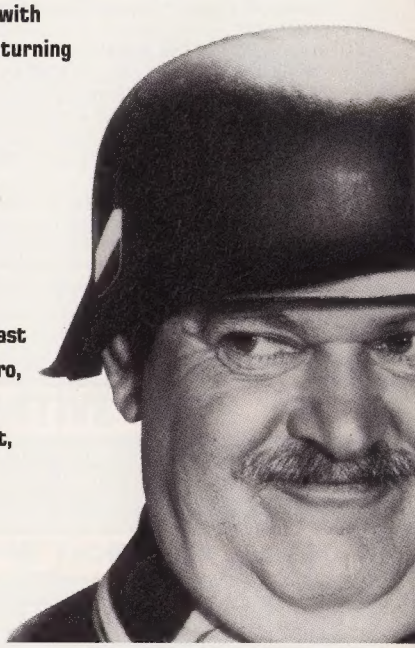

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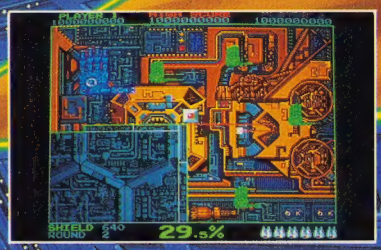

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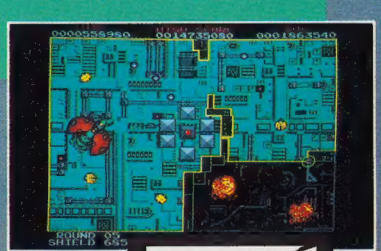

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EDITOR'S PAGE

THE FUTURE'S ROUND AND SILVER

Last summer, as I stumbled through another Consumer Electronics Show, I wandered into the Magnavox suite. (Actually, I was looking for the taxi line and took a wrong turn.) I had heard about the Magnavox CD-I (compact-disc interactive) player and wanted to see it anyway, so I figured this was as good a time as any.

The room contained dozens of players running a variety of software. I skipped past the educational stuff and settled in front of ABC Sports Golf: Palm Springs Open, produced by American Interactive Media of Los Angeles, California. I've played and enjoyed many PC-based golf games, but this one blew them away. The big difference is that the video adds a sense of reality that computer graphics, no matter how sophisticated, can't match.

As someone who makes his living in the computer world, am I concerned about CD-I, Commodore's CDTV, and other non-computer-based entertainment products? Damn right.

We've been hearing about CD-I since the mid-'80s, but the Magnavox CD-I910 is the first player that adheres to the CD-I standard co-developed by Philips and Sony. The player will sell for around $1000. And you can expect Sony and the other electronics giants to announce their own CD-I players soon. That's what's great about standards: You can buy a CD-I player without a lot of head scratching. You don't have to worry about megahertz, RAM, hard disks, VGA, and so on.

But there's no reason to panic. The biggest difference between the CD-I market and the PC-games market is that to buy a CD-I player, a family must plunk down a grand for an entertainment (or edutainment) product. Almost no one, however, buys a PC for the sole purpose of playing games. You buy it to do work at home, to run your business, to help enlighten your kids. The fact that you can play great games on it is gravy. So until CD-Is come down to less than, say, $300 PCs will have them greatly outnumbered.

But you *can* expect to see the PC market take advantage of some of the technology CD-I employs. For instance, the MPC (multimedia personal computer) standard that Microsoft and Tandy, among others, are pushing calls for a CD-ROM drive, the ability to produce digitized sound, and Windows-based software to move computers into the next generation.

Some software publishers have already begun the move to CD-based products. The question is what form will their products take: CD-I and CDTV? Or CD-ROM and MPC? Or both? Because PCs aren't consumer entertainment products, we don't see PC games competing head to head with CD-I; they will, however, compete for software developers' attention and dollars. We think there's room for both platforms, but, in any event, technology is moving to a higher level. Hang onto your 5.25-inch floppy disks — they could be collector's items in the not-too-distant future. ❑

— Dan Muse, Editor in Chief

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Wizardry I

A Fantasy Role-Playing Simulation by D.W. Bradley

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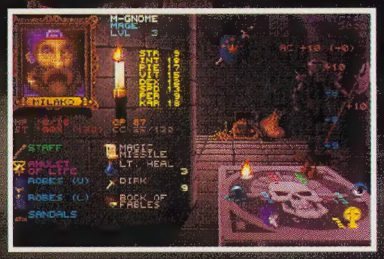

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MAILBAG

Reach for the Stars

I understand that George Lucas has his own game company, LucasFilm, and has produced quite an array of impressive titles, such as **Secret of Monkey Island** and **Their Finest Hour: The Battle of Britain**. I'm wondering whether he has any plans to design a game based on the *Star Wars* movie saga. Wouldn't it be awesome if George Lucas and Chris Roberts, designer of Origin's **Wing Commander**, joined forces to create the ultimate space game? With Lucas' *Star Wars* story and Roberts' technological know-how, it'd be a dream come true.

Ken Quach
18600 Lassen St.
Northridge, CA 91324

Graphics Hangup

On the strength of your evaluations in "Now Showing" (January/February 1991, p. 18), which reviewed a number of games based on movies, I bought two of those packages. I have questions about both of them and a serious complaint about one.

I purchased **The Hunt for Red October** (Datasoft/Software Toolworks) because I'm a great fan of the movie. The software states in the beginning, before you can play, that there are two versions — CGA and EGA — and tells you to select one. Because I have a VGA monitor, I chose EGA, which I've used for other games not written for VGA. But this time the game wouldn't start; I heard a piercing noise and then could barely get out of the program. I then chose CGA, and the game works fine, but, needless to say, the graphics images aren't the best. It was the game's graphics images that your article touted.

I thought the game was defective and I tried to reach the manufacturer by telephone, only to get a recording saying that the game's EGA graphics capability works only with an EGA monitor, not a VGA. Nowhere on the box or in your article is there any mention of this incompatibility. I've never heard that having a VGA monitor would limit your playing of certain games. Has anyone else out there had this experience? I'm not happy with this game's CGA graphics, and I'd appreciate any suggestions.

With regard to the second game I purchased, **Star Trek V: The Final Frontier** (Mindscape), the graphics images are fine, but game play is difficult. I can't get by the first segment, the worm hole. The ship seems hard to maneuver, and I can't get very far without considerable damage and then ultimate destruction. Any hints?

In addition, is there any way to bypass the opening credits? Most games let you take up where you left off or at least start the game immediately instead of sitting through the whole opening segment time after time.

I spend a lot of money on computer games, and I expect better results than those I'm experiencing. Let me add that my favorite games in terms of graphics quality, adventure excitement, and problem-free operation are those manufactured by Sierra On-Line. They're consistently excellent; I own seven currently and expect to buy more in the future.

Barbara Skradski
6027 South 36th St.
Omaha, NE 68107-3827

Reptiles' Revenge

Can any fellow *PCGames* readers help me out with two games I purchased recently? First, how do you get to Mecaturtle on level 3 in **Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles** (Konami)? I've tried everything I can think of, and I'm still stuck. Second, in **Double Dragon II: The Revenge** (Virgin Mastertronic), how do you acquire extra guys at the beginning of the game, as shown on the box?

Ryan Weatherston
Route 3
Box 3098
Roosevelt, UT 84066

Locked In

Any fans of **Future Wars Adventures in Time** (Interplay) out there? I'm stuck! I've gone through the office scene, the village, and the monastery; I've freed the girl, zapped into the future, killed the sewage monster, found the train station, fixed the fuse, and snuck past the inspector and onto the shuttle for Paris IV; now the shuttle's been sabotaged and I've ended up in a cell.

The only interactive objects are a door and an air duct, which I've used my key to open. My inventory consists of an empty blowtorch, the key, a newspaper, a lance, and some documents. I've tried using every object in my attempts to escape, and I'm still stuck. Did I miss something? I can't call the States for tips — even 800 numbers aren't toll-free from this distance. Can anyone help?

L. Moye
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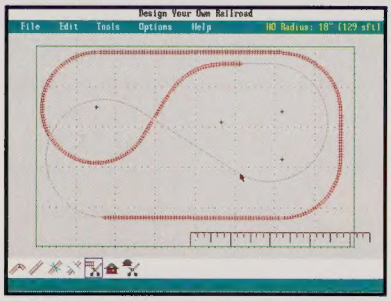

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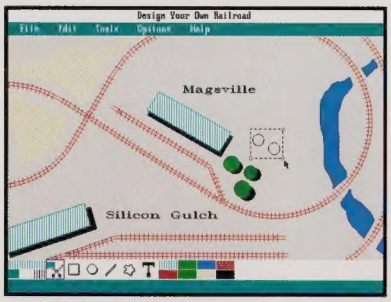

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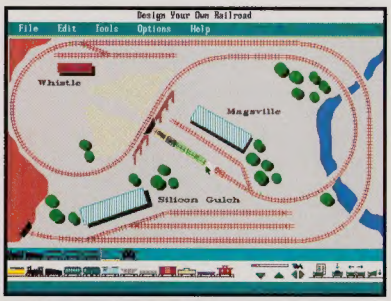

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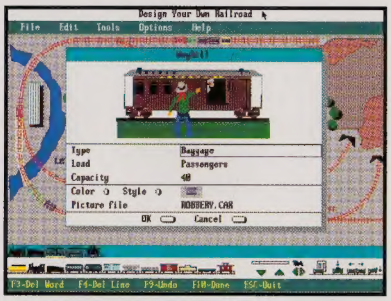

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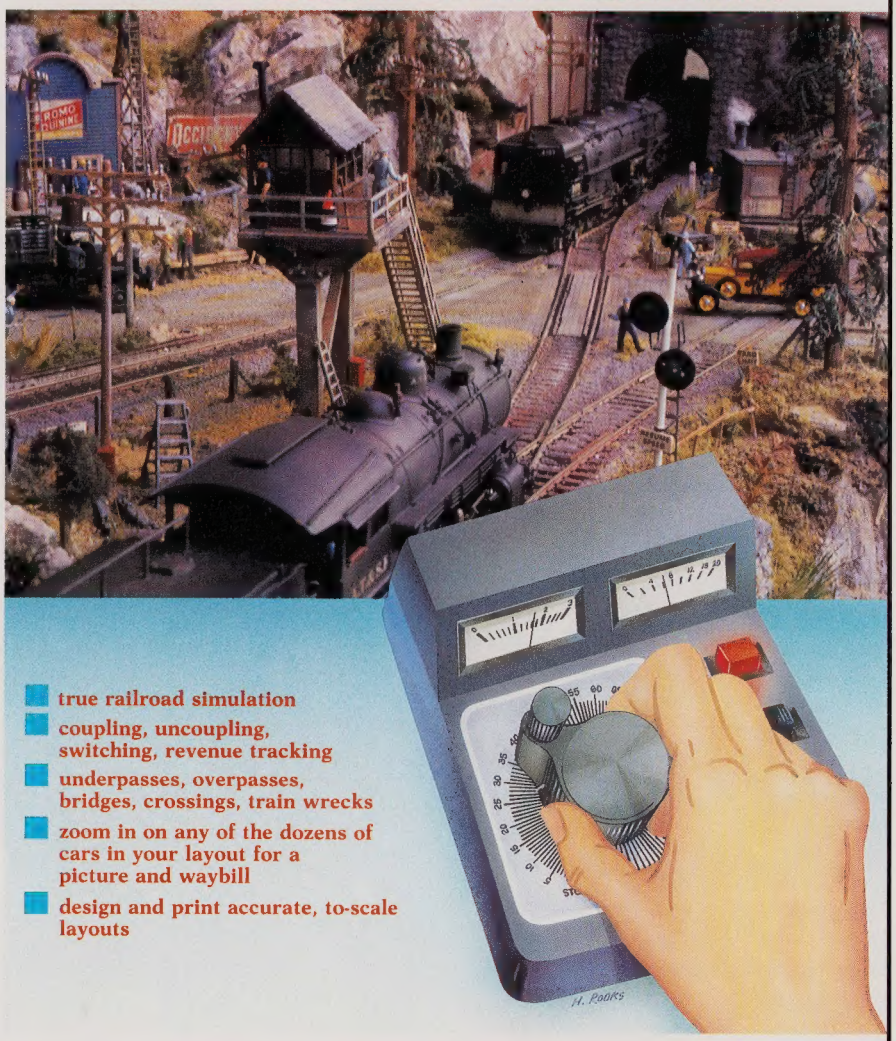

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THE GAME PRESERVE

Electronic Arts Goes the Distance

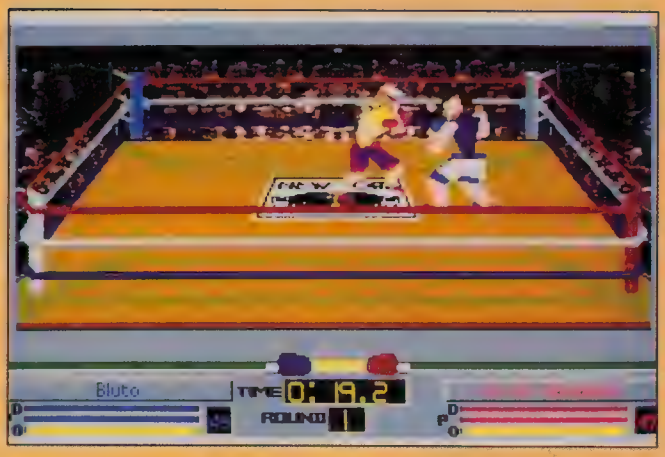
Some people already think boxing is for blockheads, and at face value Electronic Arts' **4-D Boxing** (San Mateo, CA) and its polygon-graphics pugilists will do nothing to dispel that notion. But serious fans of "the sweet science" will appreciate this one.

You train up to ten boxers in the gym to develop speed and power. Then you pick a division, from flyweight to heavyweight, and work your way up the rankings against 50 opponents in each division.

Fight in five different rings, where you go against the computer or a friend *mano á mano*. You can make the fighter bob and weave, block at several angles, and throw a variety of punches. You can even throw in the towel.

At the end of each fight, the program displays a newspaper headline declaring the outcome. You can save your boxers to disk and take them to battle 4-D Boxing opponents in other PC arenas. A multicam view feature lets you swing your monitor around the ring, move in for close-ups, or fight from a first-person perspective.

Replay knockouts later to study your opponent's technique. "True Motion" programming makes the polygon graphics images dance smoothly around the ring. This program's so realistic your boxers even age on their way to palookaville.



Electronic Arts' 4-D Boxing: It could be a contender.

✔ Take a vacation from the EA fight scene with **Are We There Yet?** ($49.95). This one's a major puzzle game à la Fool's Errand. You try to solve 300 brain teasers — jigsaw puzzles, crosswords, rebuses, anagrams, palindromes, magic squares, and more — that tell you about real-life funny places across the United States and bits of unusual American history.

✔ If you prefer to escape reality, try **The Immortal.** In this action-oriented game, you control a journeyman wizard who's searching for his master in a deep, dark, dank dungeon. Be prepared to run up against the usual suspects — trolls, orcs, worms, and, of course, a dragon. Tricks, traps, and puzzles abound. It's a sharp-looking dungeon fantasy featuring a three-quarter-view perspective of the characters as well as close-up, real-time, hand-to-hand combat sequences. For information, contact Electronic Arts at (415) 571-7171. — **W.N.**

Touchdown for MicroLeague

MicroLeague Football: The Coach's Challenge has bulked up over the off-season. MicroLeague Sports (Newark, DE) has put together a new **Deluxe Version** in a larger package that includes a complete MicroLeague System for NFL keyboard coaches. In addition to MicroLeague Football version 1.5, you get the **General Manager/ Owner's** (GMO) disk and the **MicroLeague Season** disk. The Season disk contains complete rosters and stats for the 28 NFL teams from the 1990–91 season as well as 20 great teams from the past. GMO lets you trade players, draft them, or place them on the injured reserve list. You can also create a dream team of players from any team or time. Suggested retail price is $69.95. Contact MicroLeague Sports at (302) 368-9990. — **W.N.**

New Worlds at SSI

Strategic Simulations Inc. (Sunnyvale, CA) has announced the first game in its new **Advanced Dungeons & Dragons Gold Box** series of fantasy role-play games.

Gateway to the Savage Frontier (Volume 1 in The Savage Frontier epic series, $49.95) takes place in a previously unexplored territory within The Savage Frontier's "Forgotten Realms" game world.

You embark on a quest to gather items that contain mystic power to save the frontier from dark invaders. The program uses the same game system as Pool of Radiance and Secret of the Silver Blades. Characters begin at the second level and can advance up to the eighth.

✔ **Eye of the Beholder II: The Legend of the Dark Moon** ($59.95) continues that AD&D adventure in the Forgotten Realms world. Heroes begin as widely known, experienced adventurers. Start in the city of Waterdeep and try to find the Temple Dark Moon.

Dragonlance fans should check out a new game called **Shadow Sorcerer.** This premium AD&D fantasy adventure features animated real-time combat. You form a party of four from a list of 16 famous Dragonlance heroes to battle the Great Red Dragon Ember, fend off the Draconian Army, and find a home for escaped slaves. For more information on S.S.I.products, call (800) 245-4525. — W.N.

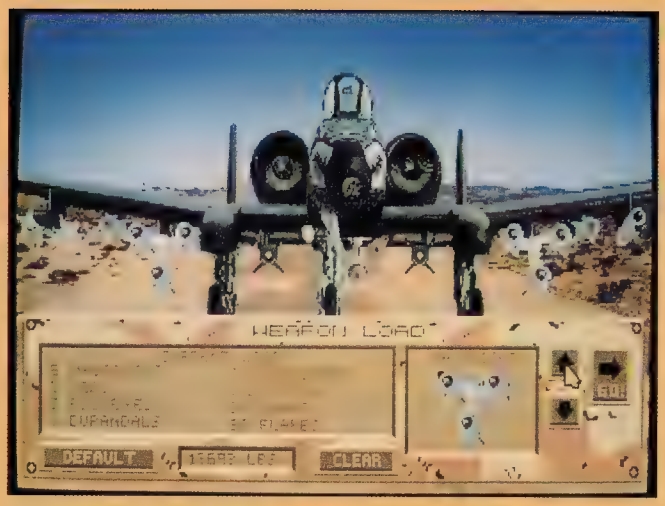
Ninja Action

If you're a PC gamer who's also a closet Nintendo Entertainment System (NES) player or a video-arcade rat, you'll be happy to know that **Ninja Gaiden II: The Dark Sword of Chaos** is now available in PC format from GameTek (North Miami Beach, FL).

This version is virtually the same as the video game, but features 256-color VGA graphics and enhanced cinema-like sequences between action segments.

No arcade-action fan deserves bragging rights until he or she has tried to perfect the Ninja Arts of the Throwing Star, the Invincible Fire Wheel, and the Fire Dragon Balls against Fire Snakes, Rockmen, and Slimes.

For more information, call GameTek at (305) 935-3995. — W.N.



A-10 Tank Killer 1.5: True-to-life reactions make it more realistic than ever.

More A-10 Tank Killing

When images from the Gulf War flew onto TV screens across the country, the Fairchild Republic A-10 Thunderbolt was one of its principal players. Now Dynamix (Eugene, OR), which put the A-10 on the PC, delivers those fierce desert battles with **A-10 Tank Killer 1.5.**

This simulator contains new flight modeling that makes the aircraft react more realistically to stress forces, battle conditions, and atmospheric effects. The game also includes the 14 missions from the original A-10. Suggested retail price is $59.95, but current registered owners can receive an upgrade with documentation for $20. Contact Dynamix at (503) 343-0772. — W.N.

Life in the Larry Lane

Okay, all you Lounge Lizards, your tacky classic's back and better (or worse) than ever. Sierra On-Line (Coarsegold, CA) has a new and improved version of **Leisure Suit Larry in the Land of the Lounge Lizards** ($59.95), and registered owners can upgrade for $39.95. Sierra promises life-like flesh tones, super-slimy scenarios, a new "point-and-grope" (a.k.a. point-and-click) interface, and some "improved" humor. This is the original Leisure Suit Larry — but tackier. Drop a line to Sierra On-Line at (800) 326-6654.

— W.N.

In the Money

If you're a fan of modem-to-modem computer gaming — live action against human opponents across town or across the country (see this month's feature "Dial M for Modem Games," p. 34) — here's a new service that can help cut those long-distance phone bills.

CompuServe's MODEM-TO-MODEM CHALLENGE FORUM offers 300-, 1200-, and 2400-baud speeds, with both players paying $6 per hour, even during peak periods. Keep in mind that using CompuServe makes sense only if you live far from your opponents; for instance, it would have been twice as expensive for my Connecticut-based opponent and I (in New York City) to play via CompuServe as to dial direct late at night. Still, the convenience of finding numerous opponents, as well as a flat, relatively economical fixed rate (especially if you want to play during the day, when direct-dial rates are highest) may be attractive. CompuServe offers on-line instructions (which you can download for free), so connecting is easy.

You log onto the Forum and see who's waiting to play. You can then issue a challenge. Typing /CHALLENGE 2 POPULOUS, for example, challenges the occupant of node 2 to a game of Populous (Electronic Arts). If he or she types /ACCEPT, you'll see the prompt Switch to POPULOUS when connected. Once connected, exit your communications program without hanging up, and run the game. A terminal program such as QMODEM, or something dimilar, lets you do this simply.

If you're accessing CompuServe via its Information Manager, though, things get trickier. You must edit the modem-control sequence by deleting the +++ (hang up) from the sign-off macro in the program's Special Preferences section. That way, when you exit Information Manager, the phone line stays active.

Besides Populous, the two other games described in the "Dial M" feature — Battle Chess from Interplay and Knights of the Sky from MicroProse — are also fully compatible with CompuServe's MTM Challenge Forum. In addition, CompuServe maintains a list of other compatible games, so check it out before dialing up.

Think of the MTM Challenge Forum as a modern-day Coliseum for computer games — show up and see who slaps you in the face with a white glove. For more information, contact CompuServe at P.O. Box 20212, 5000 Arlington Centre Boulevard, Columbus, OH 43220, (614) 457-8600.

— Bernie Yee

CRITICS CHOICE

The Best PC Games You Can Buy

Test Drive III
THE PASSION ™

Rating: 10.0 "The most exciting and realistic automobile road racing simulation available. As much fun for adults as it is for kids." — **Chicago Sun Times**

STAR CONTROL™

"Best Computer Science-Fiction Game" — **Video Games & Computer Entertainment**

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"Until recently there have been few baseball simulations worth $50. I've changed my mind after playing HardBall II … it hits a grand slam." — **Boston Herald**

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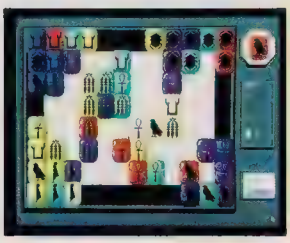
the Way of Stones



Named one of the 1991 Games 100. "A stimulating mental challenge of rare beauty and quality." — **Games Magazine**

"Five stars, magnetic... well worth the money." — **Boston Herald**

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Start Your Engines

If you're into exotic cars, racing, and your PC, Capstone (Miami, FL) has an offer you won't be able to refuse: **Super Car Pak** ($59.95), with Capstone's new **Exotic Car Showroom**, Electronic Arts' **Ferrari Formula One**, and Accolade's **Grand Prix Circuit**.

Exotic Car Showroom, also available separately for $19.95, offers VGA digitized photos of 15 breathtaking automobiles, with five perspectives for each car captured by photographer John Lamm.

Crusaders: Break out of the dungeon and get a breath of fresh air.

Included in the Exotic Car package are the Ferrari F40, GTO, and Testarossa; the Lotus Esprit; the Diablo; the Porsche 959 and 928S4; the BMW 850i; the Lamborghini Countach; and more.

Exotic Car Showroom also sports a collection of statistics and performance data, such as acceleration stats, horsepower, and more. It even features a comparison-analysis mode that lets you match one classic auto against another. Then after you're all revved up, hit the track with one of the two best-selling simulations you'll find in Super Car Pak. For more information, contact Capstone at (904) 252-9040.

— D.M.

Gamers' Salvation

The world of computer entertainment can seem overwhelming. Talk of modems, MIDI (musical-instrument digital interface), joysticks, ports, sound cards, and video cards can confuse experienced gamers as well as beginners. Even choosing a PC can be an epic adventure. R. Andrew Rathbone recognizes that games should be fun and attempts to clear up some of the difficulty in his book THE COMPUTER GAMER'S BIBLE ($8.95).

Though the title is a little pretentious, the book is a wonderful reference manual. Rathbone's style is humorous, informative, and easy to follow. He begins with an interesting account of the history of computer games and goes on to explain the various types of games, including adventure, arcade, simulation, shareware, and sports. He also offers a brief discussion of IBM, Tandy, Atari, Commodore/Amiga, and Apple/Macintosh computers and compares the strengths and weaknesses of these machines.

The book covers the difference between analog and digital joysticks, with advice on what to look for when shopping for a joystick and how to calibrate it, plus reviews of several models. Evaluations of top sound boards are included, along with brief descriptions of MIDI products, monitors, CD-ROM (compact-disc read-only memory), and a selection of video cards.

Rathbone lists many of the major entertainment-software companies, complete with addresses, phone numbers, fax numbers, hint lines, and support lines, with a look at the people "Behind the Screens," including technical- and customer-support managers from Sierra On-Line. Jordan Mechner, the young programmer who created the Broderbund hits Karateka and Prince of Persia, is also profiled.

If you need help mastering a particular game, The Computer Gamer's Bible lists sources and gives suggestions for gathering hints. It includes a piece-by-piece sample breakdown of a game's requirements, directions for installing games on a hard-disk drive, and an explanation of the various types of copy-protection schemes. Rathbone also offers tips for ambitious people who want to write their own games and answers common questions.

The text is broken up with numerous "blurbs" filled with tips and trivia to make game play more fun and intriguing. For instance, did you know that the UFOs in Space Invaders cross the screen every 25 seconds — or that you get 300 points if you destroy them on the 23rd shot of each new screen? Did you know that you can play a modem game without one by connecting two computers with a null-modem cable?

From AdLib sound cards to Zack McKracken and the Alien Mindbenders, the book's index will point you in the right direction. An appendix listing books and magazines on games, plus a glossary of terms and coupons offering savings of up to $72.95, are also included. All this in a compact 181 pages — so don't stay home without it.

— Dan Huston

Newest Wizardry

Sir-Tech Software (Ogdensburg, NY) has announced the latest sequel in its perennial best-selling Wizardry series. **Crusaders of the Dark Savant** ($79.95) picks up where Bane of the Cosmic Forge leaves off, but it's bigger and better looking than ever.

According to Sir-Tech vice president Robert Sirotech, Bane of the Cosmic Forge was a solid gaming system in the traditional of fantasy role-playing games, but didn't offer the "glitter" of 256-color graphics. In addition to the improved graphics images, Crusaders features a full soundtrack, an auto-mapping feature, and a point-and-click interface. In Crusaders, you search for a secret hidden long ago by a mad scientist. You'll explore dungeons, castles, a town, caves, and more, and partake of new spells and skills.

Another first for Wizardry is the addition of outdoor campaigns. According to Sir-Tech, players will see an outdoor landscape complete with trees, streams, and so on. Unless you get a kick out of being trapped in dark caverns, you'll enjoy this breath of fresh air.

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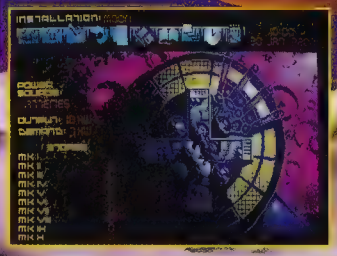

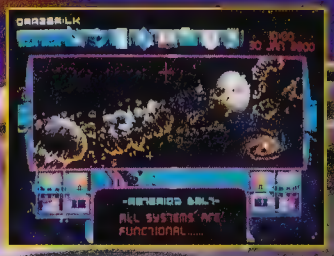

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You also have the option of creating your own characters or importing parties from Bane of the Cosmic Forge. Crusaders also offers multiple beginnings based on how you ended your game in Bane. If you haven't played a game in Bane, another beginning is available.

If you're not quite ready to give up on Bane of the Cosmic Forge, Sir-Tech has announced a clue book called **The Playmaster's Compendium** ($12.95). According to Sir-Tech, its Hints Hotline has been overextended owing to the success and complexity of Bane of the Cosmic Forge. The company claims that everything you ever wanted to know about the game is in the hint book, the first Sir-Tech has produced for a game in the Wizardry series. For more information, contact Sir-Tech at (315) 393-6644.

— D.M.

If Elected . . .

Who among us hasn't thought about how we'd run things if we were president of the United States? We're not talking about what kinds of parties you'd throw or whether or not you'd paint the White House a different color. We're talking global-power stuff.

DC True, a software-development company that's created hits such as John Madden Football, has announced plans to produce and sell its own game, **Shadow President: The Simulation of Presidential World Power** ($69.95).

According to the company, the game is based on CIA data and seven years of doctoral research at Tufts University. The model on which the simulation is based, which DC True says was presented informally to the U.S. State Department to aid in NATO strategy, covers foreign aid, alliance and coalition formation, economics, "social outcry" (demonstrations, riots, assassinations, and so on), and threat assessments.

Shadow President: The Company keeps you informed.

Shadow President features map rendering of CIA spy-satellite data; world, regional, and national maps; animated depictions of cities; a seven-member on-screen Cabinet of advisers; CIA data briefings on more than 200 countries; a world-news overview of the history you create; and more. For information on Shadow President, call DC True at (708) 866-1864.

— D.M.

Epyx Returns

Epyx (Redwood City, CA) is back. The veteran entertainment-software company is making a comeback with **California Games II,** the sequel to its best-selling sun-and-fun game. Try skateboarding, bodyboarding, jet surfing, snowboarding, and hang gliding, now with VGA graphics and AdLib sound support. In addition to the action, you get some great shots of California scenery. For information call Epyx at (415) 368-3200. **— W.N.**

Bring Your Course Design Up to Par

If you enjoy designing your own golf courses with Jack Nicklaus' Unlimited Golf & Course Design from Accolade (San Jose, CA),

Nicklaus' Clip Art: Dress up your links.

you can add the finishing touches to your 18-hole masterpiece with Accolade's new **Jack Nicklaus' Course Designers Clip Art: Volume I** ($24.95).

Choose from a collection of objects such as trees, cacti, rocks, animals, clubhouses, fountains, and more, plus golf-course fixtures such as carts and ball washers. Clip Art also includes land plots representing three geographic locales: a seaside vista, a stark desert, and a lush parkland. For more information, contact Accolade at (408) 985-1700. **— D.M.**

LucasFilms CDs

LucasFilms Games (San Rafael, CA) is gearing up for the CD-ROM (compact-disc read-only memory) consumer market. **Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade, The Secret of Monkey Island,** and a talking version of **Loom** will be available for Commodore's CDTV in 1992. The company plans to develop games for several CD-ROM-based systems over the next two years, as well as some 16-bit video-game systems. Loom, **Zak McKracken and the Alien Mindbenders,** and Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade are already available for Fujitsu's FM Towns system.

— W.N.

NES for the PC

Plenty of hits are crossing over from video games to PC games and vice versa, but **Multix Inc.** (Dallas, TX) is planning a direct route for **Nintendo Entertainment System** (NES) games to the PC. The company has a PC interface card that lets one person play video games on a TV while another person runs application software. The card will play original 8-bit NES games, which Multix intends to convert to floppy-disk format. Multix plans to price games from $5 to $12, and they'll be copy protected. For more information, contact Multix at (214) 239-4989. **— W.N.**

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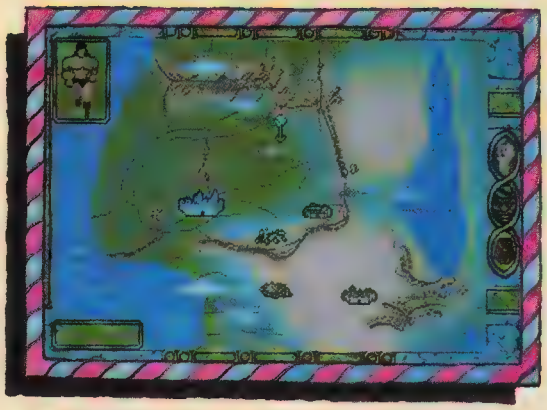

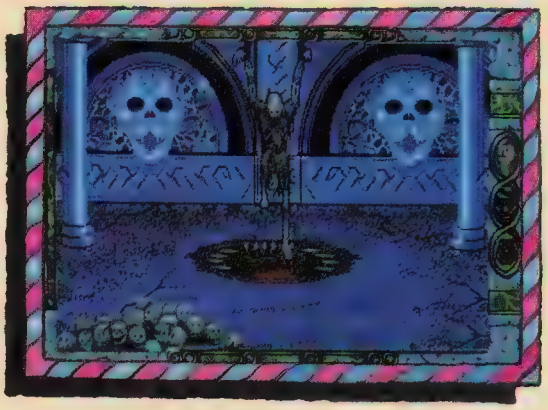

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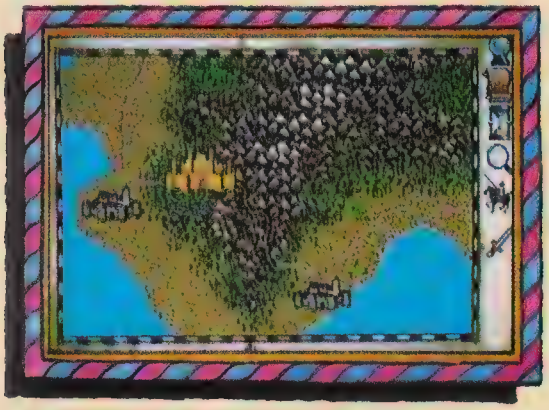

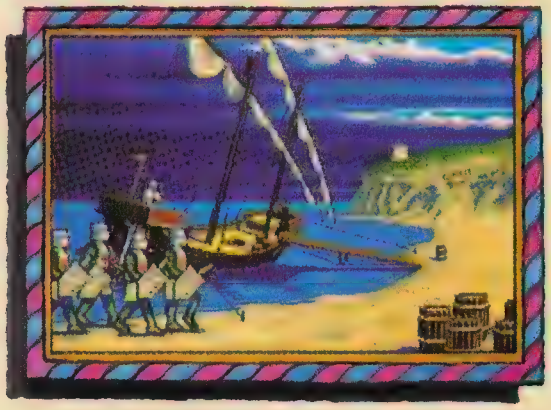

In Spirit of Excalibur, the Knights of the Round Table fought to defend medieval Britain from the evil sorceress, Morgan Le Fay. Morgan, dabbling in dark arts beyond even her ability to control, had summoned a great Lord of Demons, the Shadowmaster.

With Morgan's death, the Shadowmaster was freed to work his evil will against the unprepared folk of Britain. Striking in the night, he imprisoned the King with a spell, stole the greatest treasures of the realm and kidnapped Nineve, the court enchantress. With the loss of the sword Excalibur and the newly recovered Holy Grail, Britain begins to sicken and die. The Shadowmaster must be stopped!

Command knights and whatever followers they are able to recruit to track the Shadowmaster through hazardous, beautiful and mysterious medieval Spain. Explore the hundreds of villages and cities, fortresses and castles, dungeons and palaces and all the secret places where the Shadowmaster may dwell.

Seek what aid you can as you acquire and learn the use of the sorceries of Moorish Spain, for only with the aid of enchantments and the loyalty of strong allies will you stand a chance of ridding the world of the demonic Shadowmaster once and for all.

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IT'S LITTLE WONDER, REALLY, THAT WE DEVOTE SO MUCH ENERGY DRIVING OURSELVES to that strange little electronic town called Distraction. You know the place — the one with all the body shops, just over the border between real life and fantasy. You'll never drive a fast car faster; never have a more cataclysmic accident, watch it unfold as if from an out-of-body experience, and still walk away without a scratch; never win more gloriously or dissect a defeat more accurately than you will through the prism of your monitor.

And yet it's only fairly recently — within the last year or two — that racing games have grown beyond the treadmill feel of their arcade parents and approached the sophistication of their flight-simulator cousins. Outrun doled out alternate routes. The Test Drive brothers handed over splendidly accurate dashboards and detailed ⇨

By Peter Olafson

Illustration by ROBERT MORRISSEY

DRIVEN TO DISTRACTION

scenery. Grand Prix Circuit and The Cycles offered a sense of dimension. Indianapolis 500 furnished superb handling and a vigorous sense of speed. Things could only get better.

Reality — Without the New-Car Smell

Take a drag from Accolade's **Test Drive III** first. It doesn't exactly have the new-car smell — it's about a year old — but it covers ground untouched since the 1989 release of Spectrum Holobyte's Vette, and it covers it as never before. Test Drive III is no simple racing game or driving simulator. It's a thorough environment — a five-leg course from Paso

Turn off the afterburners and enjoy the scenery in Test Drive III.

Robles to Tioga Pass — which you can and should explore at leisure (as well as on afterburners).

You probably don't need to be told about the afterburners; that's the standard treatment in driving games, isn't it? Rush, rush, rush.

Not here. It's a place, or a reasonable facsimile of one. That means variable weather and times of day and season (take a gander at those trees), alternative routes (both mapped and unmapped), and all sorts of flickers and glimmers of life that have little to do with getting to the finish line on time, but make for a joyful trip nonetheless. Even your car feels real, with headlights, windshield wipers, compass, and the usual radar detector.

That utility pole up ahead isn't simply a streetlight, for instance, but a lit streetlight, with its own descending cone of light. That isn't just a mailbox beside the road, but a mailbox with its door open and its flag up. Someone's very definitely home throughout Test Drive III. Stoplights change color, and the rest of the population — driving nice little Boomer station wagons and sedans — usually obey them.

Bridges are out sometimes — and of course there's a little sign saying so — but can be crossed sometimes if you're daring enough and your car has the right stuff. If you follow the railroad tracks long enough from the crossing — note the *thucka-thucka* sound of your tires on the rails — you're bound to find a train, a moving train, with several attached cars, a light in front, and telltale red-and-blue striping on the locomotive.

Don't like the tune on the radio? Change stations. (Ah, classical — and quite nice with the AdLib sound card.) Don't like this one, either? Change it again.

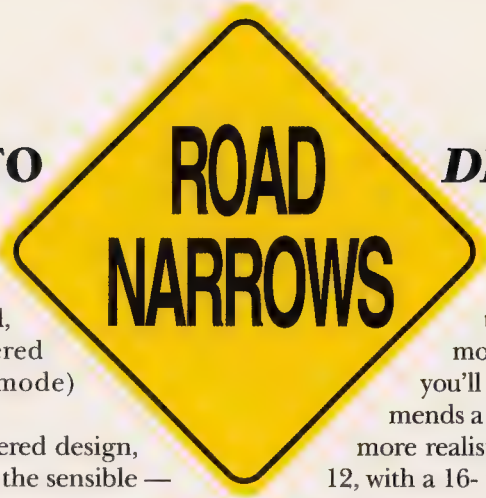
Police are more aggressive here than in the earlier Test Drives. They were content to trail you through the course, remember? In this version, though, they'll not only head you off, but they'll just as soon throw up a roadblock as throw down a ticket.

Signs assume a new importance, as they're no longer merely scenery, but a good way — sometimes the only way — of locking down your location. And if you see an exit, well, for heaven's sake, take it, man, take it. Who knows where it leads? Perhaps to a simple cul-de-sac. Perhaps to something you'd never see if you didn't take it — a little blue car racing around its own private oval, or a boat by a lake, or something better.

CERV III
Corporate Experimental Research Vehicle
Engine: 3.7 liter, twin turbocharged, intercooled 32-valve V8
Power: 650 horsepower @ 6000 rpm
Torque: 655 lb-ft @ 4000 rpm
Drivetrain: 3-speed Turbo-Hydramatic 2-speed gearbox

Test Drive III draws you in with a wealth of realistic detail.

Life-threatening injury is everywhere — though some judicious hill jumping can propel you into the lead or damage your car enough that you'll have



trouble catching up. If you should crash in water, you're treated to an inside-the-car-wash cascade. If you're on land, you'll see a horrifying shattered windshield and (in replay mode) smoke over your car.

It's a thoughtful, well-considered design, with subtleties that range from the sensible — keeping you invulnerable for a moment or two after each crash to get out of harm's way — to the crucial. Once you've been off road for a few seconds, the game lets you return, recognizing you're in a grudge match against drivers less taken with the scenery. Your opponents get tickets and have accidents, but they're dogged in their pursuit. By the last leg, with snow encroaching, curves everywhere, and a road like the inside of a coal sack, it's all you can do to stay on the pavement and pointed in the right direction. The maps in the manual are vital.

All four driving extravaganzas sport instant replay, but Test Drive III's ability to rotate, zoom in and out, and angle the perspective up and down makes it the most versatile.

And this only scratches the surface. Some golf games feature less scenery than Test Drive III. About the only thing you can't do is hop out and explore the buildings.

A couple of suggestions for the already converted: You'd do well to seek out last December's upgrade for the program's main executable file; it improves keyboard and joystick response noticeably. And if you've grown jaded with the built-in cars and course, Accolade's add-on **Road & Car #1** data disk contains two new cars (the Acura NSX and Dodge Stealth R/T Turbo) and a new course from Provincetown to Niagara Falls that offers hot-air balloons, regional architecture, at least three species of roadside animals, and what looks to be a slew of Greyhound buses.

It's easy to pick nits when a game's this good, because even small problems stand out. With the AdLib card, the engine sounds more like your neighbor's weed whacker than a high-horsepower automobile. The Lamborghini Diablo's dashboard doesn't really look digitized, as the Chevrolet Chev III and the Pininfarina Mythos' do. Collision detection could use some fine-tuning in spots; as it is, cars can pass through the interior of overhanging hills. The Cape Cod course has segments over which the road and filled-polygon backdrop simply disappear. And the lovely illusion of a complex world can evaporate if pursued too diligently; three-dimensional objects (a beam of light, for example) suddenly turn out paper-thin when put to the test. Moreover, to get the most out of the game in its glory, you'll need a fast PC. Accolade recommends a minimum of 8 megahertz, but a more realistic low end is nothing less than 12, with a 16- to 20-megahertz machine being ideal. Nevertheless, with the exception of PC speed, these are more quibbles than substantial problems.

Test Drive III is brilliant, utterly unlike anything else in the field (including its predecessors). Tearing yourself away is as tough as getting out of an air-conditioned car on a blisteringly hot day. Test Drive III is simply everything you could want in a driving game. It doesn't just drive you to Distraction — it buys you dinner and puts you up in a nice hotel, too.

Role-Play Racing

Mario Andretti's Racing Challenge — a recent release from Electronic Arts — offers some racecar role play. You can race six types of cars, from sprinters to Indy racers, on 12 different tracks. But not right away. All in good time, if you make good time on the circuit.

This is no boot-and-drive program. There's a little matter of learning and earning. You start out the game with no car and no money, and while you can obtain a sponsor and $20,000 for the asking, that buys you only a sprinter.

Mario Andretti's Racing Challenge makes you earn your way to the top.

From there, you'll struggle as the sparks fly upward. You'll need to earn money by winning purses in races so that you can buy the faster types of cars, or replace the ones you'll trash. It's not easy. You'll fight for every success, and even for the failures. And just when you think you've mastered a technique,

DRIVEN TO DISTRACTION

there's another track, another car, and another set of rules.

You'll be thankful that Andretti, who played a part in the program's creation, is on hand with gentle and sober advice. For instance, when starting out in the sprint cars, you'll need to master the difficult art of sliding through dirt track curves. In the Indy cars, you'll have to guard against oversteering and learn to keep the car's staggering power (244 miles per hour on the LeMans long back straight) in check.

Don't worry. You're not wholly locked out of the fast track. You can drive any of these cars in practice. But racing those cars against opponents in anything but a sprint car is a reward reserved to players who succeed at earlier levels of the game.

Now, that's a great idea: a game that demands improvement. In fact, you may actually find that Andretti improves your driving skills in other games. It makes you think like a driver — not a game player.

The VGA palette is lovely and hot, especially the 256-color angled-down drawings of each track. Controls are agreeably basic: accelerate, brake, and steer. The animated pit stops are charming. The engine sounds have just the right ripping timbre. And the car handling is about the best around, with a delicacy and fine touch not usually associated with racing games.

As with the other programs, you'll need some processor power to get the best frame rate out on the track, and the game sets detail to the optimal level for your system automatically. Electronic Arts recommends a minimum of 10 megahertz for Andretti. Slower systems may boot to a full graphics backdrop on the starting grid, but display little more than the walls and flagman for the rest of the circuit. Naturally, you can change the detail level. On a 12-megahertz machine, the full-detail mode, while packed with off-track buildings, was fun to watch, but bulky and difficult in play; with minimum detail, it flew like a bird.

Andretti is a delightfully tough-minded creation. If you typically regard computer-game titles as hyperbole, don't make that mistake here. Mario Andretti's Racing Challenge is exactly that, and there's enough challenge — and enough reward — to keep you coming back for months.

And wait 'till you see how it crashes. It's a not-so-well-kept secret that second only to how well a car handles, computer car racers care most about how well a car crashes. Why do you suppose all of these games have instant-replay modes — so you can admire your great passing technique? Not so!

Bill Elliott: The art of computer gaming imitates life.

The action in the pits may determine the outcome in Bill Elliott's game.

Southern Stock-Car Comfort

Stock cars crash just right in **Bill Elliott's NASCAR Challenge** from Konami. Handle the banked curve wrong, brush the wall for a moment, and you'll begin a long, skittering disintegration. Viewed on instant replay, with flames and pieces flying and your car swirling down toward the infield, it's almost scary. It's almost like watching it happen on television.

That's probably the wrong place to start — no racer wants a crash — but it's something that Bill Elliott does very right, and one of those rare

DRIVEN TO DISTRACTION

moments when computer-game life imitates real life successfully. And because it's on computer, it's great fun to watch, with no attached guilt.

Bill Elliott is at once the narrowest of the games here, covering just one type of racing, but it's one of the deepest. You can tune up cars in four areas: engine setup, tire stagger, gear ratio, and spoiler angle for practice, qualifying, or racing. There's even an auto-qualify option to get you on the track. In the pits, you can make as many as seven changes, even clean the windshield. Learning how to handle pit stops in Bill Elliott is as vital as it is at Daytona.

There's a lot of scenery. The detail visible on other cars may remind you of the first two Test

Stunts — the best of its genre — tough, gritty, adaptable.

Drives. Sounds are roaring and well done, with even the rare use of digitized voice with the AdLib card. Bill Elliott races fast and clean, and, as noted, does crashes justice. You'll have them frequently. Bill Elliott has a good-sized learning curve, and it'll take a while before everything meshes.

If this sounds mildly antiseptic, and you're wondering if there's something missing here, it's variety. As nicely as the game plays, there are just three cars from which to choose, and the form itself is somewhat limiting. Of the eight available tracks, six are variations of the standard oval — the two that aren't are murder — and driving around an elongated circle can get old fast. The game simply feels small.

It's also a bit hard to tell what *No Damage* mode changes. (I managed to blow my engine and redecorate the track just fine each time I used it.) And the copy protection uses red-brown construction paper that's difficult to read under anything weaker than an interrogation lamp. A code wheel in the style of Test Drive III's clever match-the-ignition-keys scheme might have been easier on the eyes.

It's a matter of taste. If you love watching these popular races on TV, and think you could do better, you'll probably like Bill Elliott. If you're looking for something with a bit more staying power, this one runs out of gas just outside of Distraction.

Bring In the Stunt Cars!

That's one of the nice things about stunt-driving games: Most come with editors, so there's a potential user-created racing game in the same package.

No surprise, then, that months back every developer threw us for a loop: Spectrum Holobyte with Stunt Driver, MicroPlay with Stunt Track Driver, and, more recently, England's Domark with Hard Drivin' II. (The latter is available only as an import, and although it lacks some of the friendliness of the domestic competition, it's one of the smoothest around on slower PCs.)

One of the most recent stunt driving games, and probably the best, is Broderbund's **Stunts**. It's a tough one. That's the first thing you'll notice. There's an accident waiting to happen to all but the fastest cars at the top of the first hill on the default track. All the familiar stunts are here, from bridge jumping to

Stunts: All the basic moves, plus distinctive interiors and lots of extras.

loop-the-loops, but Stunts tosses in corkscrews and pipes with nasty walls right in the middle. The spiral ramps and see-through elevated roadways are nice touches, as are dirt and ice on the road.

DRIVEN TO ROAD ENDS DISTRACTION

The next thing you'll note is the powerful track editor. You can do virtually anything the designers did, including selecting terrain (though not designing it). The city backdrop looks like a painting, not the typical racing-game urban scene, and the country setting has just the right distant haze and cloud-shadowed hilltops.

And how can you not love a game that places its course inside a storm fence, and lets you plunk down a million Joe's Diners — each with its own flashing lavender neon sign? With a little effort, you could build a whole post-modern city with Stunts.

There are also 11 cars from which to choose, cars as fast as the Porsche March Indy, off-road cars as rugged as the Lamborghini LM-002, and (to quote the manual) "everyday types of vehicles" such as the $150,000 Lamborghini Countach. Each has its own distinctive interior and habits, and each handles with the same ease.

As in Test Drive III, collision detection occasionally seems elusive. Cars land on their sides and go their merry way. The tunnels look sort of silly: They feel as though you're driving into a kiln or an air duct. But that's about as bad as it gets.

Stunts also sports lots of little extras. You can't cheat by driving around the stunts, much as you might like to after a couple of unsuccessful runs.

The program knows if you've been bad, and holds it against you. For instance, a little arrow points you back to the track when you spin off. After a race against a computer opponent, you're treated to a cute sequence in which an animated graphics image of your opponent either gloats over the win or makes excuses for the loss. And sometimes those excuses get a bit pointed.

A bit of explanation: I'd used the track editor to build a huge banked oval that would let cars run flat out, and had won several races against easier opponents. Then I ran up against a fellow who, on losing, complained that my course was "virtually a drag strip." True enough. I laughed, put this down to inspired coincidence, and raced him again.

He lost again, and this time challenged me to, in so many words, "put a few curves in it."

I put down the joystick rather slowly, picked up my dropped jaw, and walked into the next room to tell my wife.

Welcome to Distraction. ❑

PRODUCT INFORMATION

Bill Elliott's NASCAR Challenge
Konami
900 Deerfield Parkway
Buffalo Grove, IL
60089-4510
(708) 215-5111
$49.95
640K IBM PC
or compatible
10MHz or faster
recommended
Hercules, CGA, EGA, VGA, MCGA, Tandy 16-color
supports AdLib, Sound Blaster, Roland MT-32 sound boards, Tandy sound
joystick optional

Mario Andretti's Racing Challenge
Electronic Arts
1820 Gateway Drive
San Mateo, CA 94404
(415) 571-7171
$49.95
640K IBM PC
or compatible
requires 10MHz 286
or faster
EGA, VGA, MCGA
supports AdLib, Roland MT-32 sound boards

Stunts
Broderbund Software
17 Paul Drive
San Rafael, CA
94903-2101
(415) 492-3200
$49.95
640K IBM PC
or compatible
EGA, VGA, Tandy 16-color
512K IBM PC
Hercules, CGA
8MHz 286 or faster
recommended
requires DOS 2.1 or later
supports AdLib, Sound Blaster, Roland MT-32 sound boards, Tandy sound

Test Drive III: The Passion
Accolade
550 South Winchester Blvd.
San Jose, CA 95128
(408) 985-1700
$59.95
640K IBM PC
or compatible
8MHz or faster
recommended
EGA, VGA, MCGA,
Tandy 16-color
supports AdLib, CMS, Tandy 3-voice, Sound Blaster, Roland MT-32, LAPC-1 sound boards
joystick optional

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WORLD

MOVIE STILL ARCHIVES

Uh-ten-SHUN! Listen up, you dogfaces, swabbies, and flyboys. I hear you're itchin' to replay the Big One, WWII. That right? Then fall out and follow me. What's the problem? Does your PC want to live forever?

Half a century ago, the world was aflame, from steamy Burmese jungles to frozen Soviet steppes. Unbeaten German armies stood before Moscow, ready for the final push into the capital. Japanese carriers had decimated the United States Pacific Fleet, and were poised everywhere from the Philippines to Singapore. And the world held its breath.

Whether you dream of facing Panzer divisions, lurking at periscope depth as you await a passing convoy, or dogfighting over the English Channel, here are some of the best and the brightest combat challenges of World War II, just waiting for your command.

Fire All Bow Tubes!

Submarines stalked their prey from the Arctic Ocean to the Sea of Japan, sending hundreds of ships to the bottom in one of the most important naval campaigns ever. Microprose re-creates the Pacific undersea war with **Silent Service II**, an incredibly accurate, state-of-the-art simulation that

AT WAR

Meet the heroes and the villains, relive the drama and excitement of the Last Good War — with the help of your home PC.

By Mark E. Reynolds

draws you into its realistic world along the most gradual of learning curves.

Silent Service II puts you in command of a U.S. submarine in the Pacific at whatever period you choose between December 1941 (the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor) and the end of the war in 1945.

You can pick your sub and jump right into the game at its easiest levels, though you'll tire quickly of limited seamanship. Fat, juicy cargo ships will simply escape your clutches, and Japanese escorts will swarm on you like bees and rock you to sleep with depth charges. It's time to learn a little more about Silent Service II.

Of course, you can spend some time with its

MOVIE STILL ARCHIVES

excellent manual right off for a more studied entry (perhaps as a real skipper would do). Whatever your approach, it's only when you begin to understand your sub's strengths and weaknesses — the tactics that work and the ones that don't, which you gain through experience at the helm and by mining the manual's valuable information on WWII weapons — that you really begin to understand the thrill of Silent Service II.

Once you've acquired some degree of mastery of submarine warfare, you can seriously explore the wealth of situations and submarine types that Silent Service II offers. Besides the training missions, you can try a single historical battle against a convoy of unarmed merchant ships, an escorted convoy of merchant ships, or formidable warships. Or try a random encounter, where you don't know just who's going to join the party. But you'd better locate the more dangerous attendees before you start shooting.

From single battles, you can move on to a war patrol, where you sail from port toward your designated patrol zone and engage whatever targets

Silent Service II:
The Big One heats up in the Pacific.

cross your path. Just make sure you head for home while you have enough fuel left.

When you think you've got the skill, and the time, set off on a war career. You can sign on as a skipper at any date from December 7, 1941, and follow the call of duty through to the end of the war. Meritorious service earns you medals and promotions, and staying alive lets you upgrade your weapons or take command of newer subs as they become historically available.

Silent Service II is a magnificent battle simulation. It offers just the right combination of action and strategy to challenge both serious war gamers and casual players. And no matter how skillful a skipper you become, you can easily find a scenario to push you to the limit.

Owing So Much to So Few

If you prefer the wild blue yonder to the claustrophobic life inside a submarine, climb into the cockpit of Lucasfilm's **Their Finest Hour: The Battle of Britain**. This game simulates Germany's attempt to gain air superiority over Britain during the summer of 1940 in preparation for a planned invasion. You take the role of a German bomber crew, a German fighter pilot, or a British fighter pilot.

Like Silent Service II, Their Finest Hour's handsome 194-page manual is good reading even if you don't play the game. It's full of interesting information and actual photos of this dramatic episode of WWII. In fact, it's more a historical source book than a software manual. Use the *Reference Card* that comes with the game to learn which keys control your aircraft. (A joystick or mouse is definitely recommended on this one, but you'll also need keyboard control for all aspects of flying beyond steering and firing your guns.)

The manual gives you a historical overview, eyewitness accounts from pilots and civilians on both sides, technical data on the planes involved, and information on tactics used on both sides. The plane you choose performs like its historical counterpart, and, if you're wise, your tactics will mimic those of actual pilots.

Combat action comes fast and furious, requiring all the joystick or mouse skill you can muster. Spend plenty of time in the practice missions if you want to stay in the air. If you're not an excellent pilot, the sky over the English Channel in 1940 is no place for you.

And like Silent Service II, Their Finest Hour offers an infinite variety of opportunities to challenge your skill. As a British pilot, you're limited to flying a single-seat Spitfire or Hurricane fighter. German pilots can choose from two single-seat fighters, four two-seat (pilot and rear gunner) fighter/dive bombers, or three medium bombers (manned by a pilot, a bombardier, and three to five gunners).

Each plane comes with its own set of single missions, and successful pilots and crews can earn experience points that make them more valuable for future missions. The game also lets you play through the entire 1940 campaign, and even design your own missions. The *Mission Builder* option lets you customize your own scenarios

Their Finest Hour:
Fight to the death over the English Channel.

— each with up to 16 planes divided among both sides — and save them to disk to play later.

On a VGA system, Their Finest Hour presents excellent graphics and a healthy dose of strategy. You'll appreciate them both when you're in a group attacking escorted bombers, or when you're flying escort: You'll have to think things out and then make sure you're shooting at the right targets. Your buddies won't like it if you just start poking holes in whatever happens to pass across your sights. Their Finest Hour pushes your computer-pilot skills to the limit.

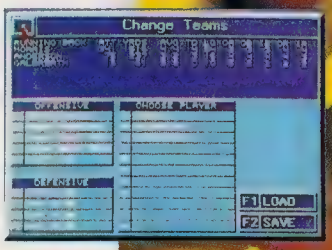
Operation Barbarossa

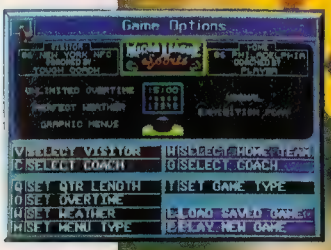
On June 22, 1941, the German army launched an attack on the Soviet Union. Dubbed Operation Barbarossa, it stands as the largest military operation the world has ever known. Although the Germans eventually

Now that you've saved the planet and rescued the Princess 41 times...

you're ready for a real challenge!

IBM EGA





Try tackling the New Deluxe Edition of MicroLeague Football - *The Coach's Challenge!* It puts you in charge of a pro football franchise.

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MicroLeague Basketball-Coming soon for IBM, Macintosh & Amiga
MicroLeague Football Deluxe Official Guide & Game Disk published by Bantam Computer Books
College Football version available soon. Call for details.

MICROLEAGUE SPORTS

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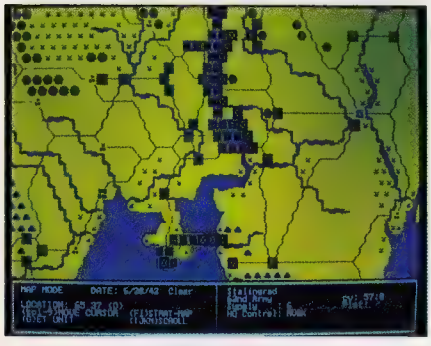
pushed to the outskirts of Moscow and victory, the Russians finally turned them back, resulting in an important defeat for the Axis.

SSI's **Second Front: Germany Turns East** re-creates what was perhaps the most challenging strategic puzzle of the war as it lets you try your hand as the German or Soviet commander against a human or computer opponent. SSI has included a remarkable amount of detail in this advanced-level simulation — it's not for the casual gamer.

As supreme commander, you direct your troops' movement, combat operations, supplies, and reinforcements. You oversee air operations and the production of war materials in the factories. You've also got to manage each corps' readiness level and its proximity to its headquarters, and even who's in command there. As the Axis commander, you must pay attention to how the war on the Western and Italian Fronts affects your efforts on the Eastern Front, and keep the partisans under control behind your lines.

The program offers no training mode — how could you train for something this big? — but you can



Second Front: On to Stalingrad.

alter the balance of play to give yourself some extra help. Whatever you choose, this game is tough.

Four different scenarios — the complete 1941 or 1942 campaigns, or the more limited Moscow or Stalingrad offensives — are available. In the full-board scenarios, the game map stretches from Finland to the Black Sea, from Berlin to Moscow. That's a lot of territory.

There are also a lot of troops to command, and a lot of enemies to face. Fortunately, you don't have to annihilate your opponent to win. For each scenario, designated cities have point values. Considering that each turn equals one week, if you start in 1941 you'll be playing a long time.

The level of complexity built into this game, plus the size of the task it presents, makes Second Front for hard-core gamers only. They'll be the only ones with the patience to attend to the required detail, turn after turn, that's necessary to complete the game successfully. They'll also be the only ones willing to put up with some of the rough spots in the programming.

Although the folks at SSI have done an amazing job of including the fine points of strategic command, they've overlooked one or two things. On a 16-megahertz 386SX machine, for instance, the results of each air strike and each division's combat flashed on screen so quickly they couldn't be read.

And because the computer can take up to 15 minutes to process your move, then move its divisions and process those results, you're watching an information overload. It's a real brain buster trying to keep up.

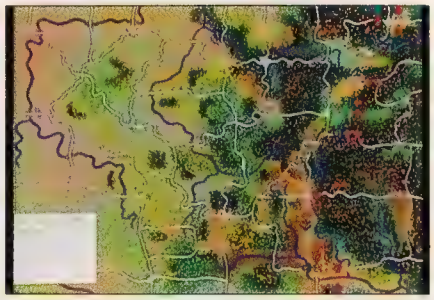
On an 8-megahertz PC-XT with CGA graphics, the information appeared slowly enough to read, but because everything was in black-and-white, it demanded better eyes than mine. Waiting the quarter hour while Second Front calculates combat resolution is also frustrating. Most commanders won't appreciate the downtime.

Second Front does include one great feature, though. During play, you can alter the amount of help the program gives one side, and you can even switch sides. In effect, you can look at a tactical problem from several angles, or replay a saved game from your opponent's point of view.

Nuts!

Patton Strikes Back isn't like any other war game on the PC. The designer, Chris Crawford, has filled his creation with a wealth of dazzling graphics images, an eminently playable tactical challenge, digitized sound, and interesting asides.

By December 1944, American troops stationed along the 80-mile front in Belgium and Luxembourg were



Patton Strikes Back: At the Battle of the Bulge.

complacent. The war was nearly over, wasn't it? On December 16, they were caught off guard as Hitler's troops counterattacked in a desperate gamble to turn the tide of World War II.

You can face what became known as the Battle of the Bulge as either the American or the German commander. You can choose to boost the power of either army, giving yourself an advantage while you're learning the game. With an easy-to-learn interface, Patton Strikes Back doesn't demand too much classroom time before you're ready to take on its more engaging challenges.

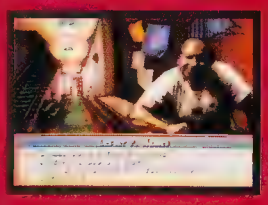
If you're the American, initially in the weaker position, you want to delay the German advance until your reinforcements (in the form of George Patton's Third Army) can turn the tide. If you're the German, you want to hit hard and fast, cut off enemy units and supplies, and occupy key points (Bastogne, for instance, where an American general uttered the classic "Nuts!" in response to a German demand for surrender) before the Americans can recover.

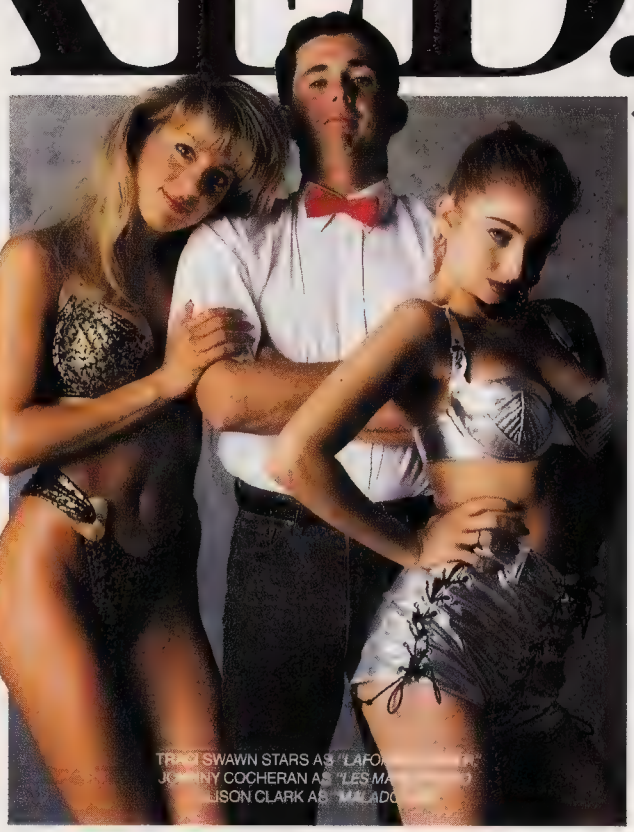
Patton Strikes Back is much less taxing than Second Front, and far more playable. Controlling your troops is easy enough to keep most players amused, while the extras distinguish this game from the competition. Pull down the *Analysis* menu, for instance, and request some tactical advice. You'll see an animated,

"SHE STOOD NAKED,

HER WET BODY BATHED IN BEVERLY

HILLS MOONLIGHT. THE STRANGER CREPT OUT FROM THE SHADOWS TOWARDS THE POOL. LIKE THE STARLETS WHO HAD VANISHED BEFORE HER, SHE WAS OBLIVIOUS TO HIS MENACING PRESENCE. HER SCREAM WAS NOT HEARD." THE HIPPEST STARS IN HOLLYWOOD ARE BEING KIDNAPPED. AND ONLY ONE MANLEY CAN SOLVE THE CRIME OF THE CENTURY. *LES MANLEY IN LOST IN L.A.*™ PLUNGES THE HERO OF *SEARCH FOR THE KING*™ INTO A MEGA-MYSTERY THAT SPANS ALL OF LA LA LAND. MEET GORGEOUS BABES, BODY BUILDERS, ROCK STARS, OUT-OF-WORK ACTORS—





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Circle 14 on Reader Service Card.

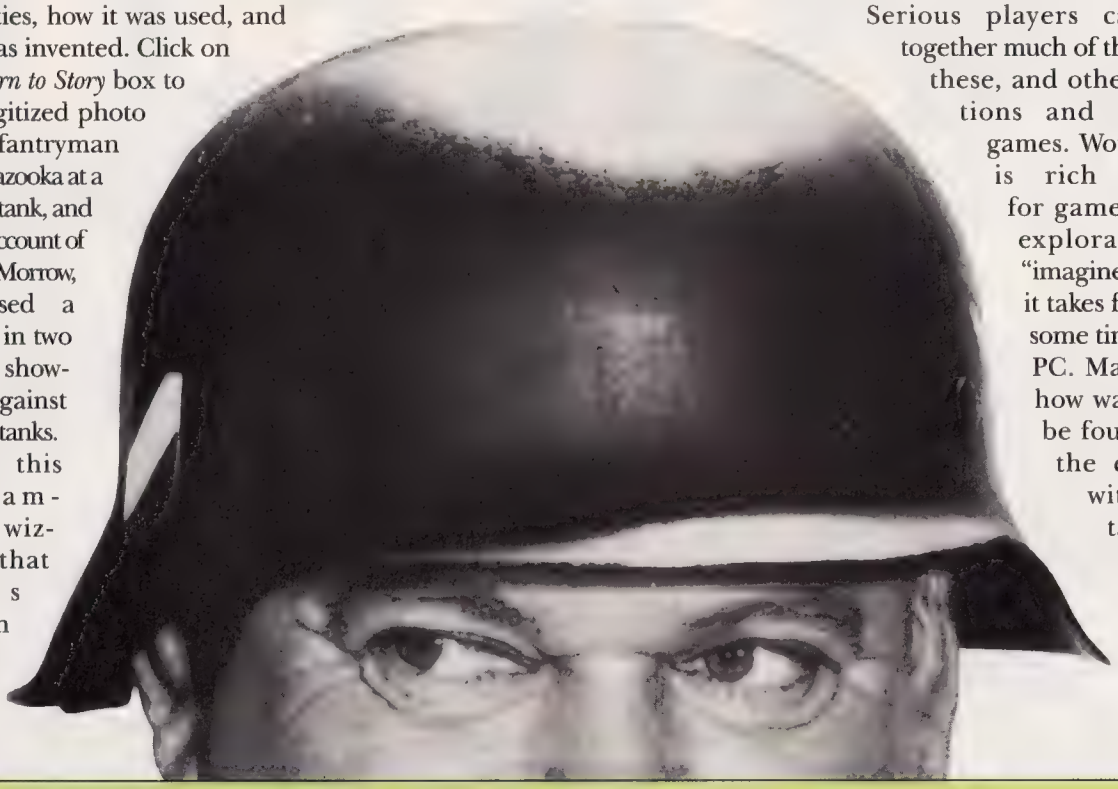
digitized image of a cigar-smoking, coffee-swilling general who gives you a suggestion or two, something like, "I think we ought to go rough up the 267th Volksgrenadier division." Or pull down the *History* menu for a wealth of information on such topics as weapons, tactics, personalities, strategy, or individual units. For example, select *weapons*, then *bazooka*, and you'll see a semi-technical drawing of the weapon and read an account of its capabilities, how it was used, and why it was invented. Click on the *Return to Story* box to see a digitized photo of an infantryman firing a bazooka at a German tank, and read an account of Lt. Jesse Morrow, who used a bazooka in two hairy showdowns against German tanks.

It's this programming wizardry that makes Patton Strikes Back not just another simulation, but an entertaining — and even educational — stepping stone to an understanding of the elements and challenges in the Battle of the Bulge.

Victory Is Ours

Four powerful simulations let you re-create different pieces of the last global war, World War II. If you lean toward fast arcade-type action, Their Finest Hour asks the most of your joystick skills while demanding a reasonable amount of strategy and planning. Silent Service II provides perhaps the perfect blend of tactical cunning and quick action under fire. Patton Strikes Back hands over plenty of tidbits for the military tactician, and Second Front works best for the hard-core war gamers among us.

Serious players can piece together much of the war with these, and other, simulations and historical games. World War II is rich territory for game creators' exploration and "imagineering." All it takes from you is some time on your PC. Maybe *this* is how wars should be fought — on the computer, with deaths tallied in pixels and bytes, not in human lives. ❑



MOVIE STILL ARCHIVES

PRODUCT INFORMATION

Patton Strikes Back

Broderbund Software
17 Paul Drive
San Rafael, CA 94903
(415) 492-3120
$59.95
640K IBM PC or compatible
requires 10MHz 286 minimum
VGA
supports AdLib sound card
requires hard-disk drive
(2 to 3 megabytes free)
mouse recommended

Second Front: Germany Turns East

Strategic Simulations Inc.
675 Almanor Ave.
Sunnyvale, CA 94086
(408) 737-6800
$59.95
512K IBM PC or compatible
CGA, EGA

Silent Service II

Microprose
180 Lakefront Drive
Hunt Valley, MD 21030
(301) 771-1151
$59.95
512K IBM PC or compatible
640K recommended
CGA, EGA, VGA,
Tandy 16-color
supports AdLib,
Roland MT-32 sound cards
joystick optional

Their Finest Hour: The Battle of Britain

Lucasfilm Games
P.O. Box 10307
San Rafael, CA 94912
(415) 721-3300
$59.95
512K IBM PC or compatible
CGA, EGA, VGA,
Tandy 16-color
supports AdLib sound card
joystick or mouse
recommended

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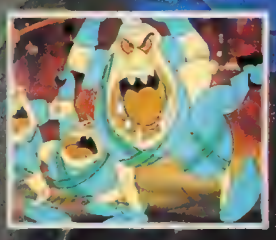
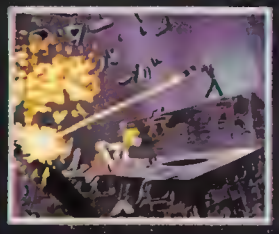




READYSOFT

ReadySoft Incorporated
30 Wertheim Court, Suite 2
Richmond Hill, Ontario, Canada L4B 1B9
Tel: (416) 731-4175 Fax: (416) 764-8867

Circle 53 on Reader Service Card.

Computer-and-phone-line hookups are fast turning solitaire into a thing of the past.

By Bernie Yee

Dial M for

THE GAME IS WING COMMANDER. THE PLACE, SPACE OPERA. Two Hornets, maneuverable, lightly armed and armored fighters, engage a trio of quite lethal enemy Gratha. The human pilot punches his afterburners, veers around the Gratha, and lets loose with lasers. Though comparatively weak, the lasers eventually knock out the Gratha's shields, vaporize the Kilrathi armor, and blow the engines right out from underneath the Drakkath's tail. Our hero takes out all three Gratha, but his computer-controlled wingman doesn't fare quite so well — his Hornet is crushed by one of the Gratha's formidable weapons.

We cheat. We take unfair advantage of built-in computer opponents, those intractable, unintelligent piles of variables and algorithms that tell a game how to fight back. Not that electronic entertainment is always a walkover for the breathing side — programmers compensate for the weak intelligence of computer-controlled opponents by stacking nearly insurmountable odds against you. High on drama, short on realism.

A human controlling that Gratha would likely have pounded you into space debris. And though a game like Wing Commander promises enemy intelligence to match your own abilities, it's easy to stay skeptical.

There's just nothing like a human opponent, no matter what the game.

You have two ways to play a computer game against another person. One puts your opponent right next to you, like a PC with lots of brains, intuition, and creativity. Two game controllers — joysticks work best — are required. A spouse, a roommate, a friend, or a live-in — one with the same schedule, interests, and time — is indispensable, too.

Not practical? There's another way. Modem-to-modem gaming links let you hook up your computer to another computer, anywhere in the world. Oppo-

Modem Games

nents can be on opposite ends of the country, or in the same county. Three highly acclaimed games — Interplay's **Battle Chess**, Electronic Arts' **Populous**, and MicroProse's **Knights of the Sky** — come equipped to play over the phone, and represent some of the best modem-to-modem packages around.

Chess Gets Personal

In Star Wars, R2D2 played a holographic chess-like game against Chewbacca. Little holograms grunted across the table and fought each other; pieces that were killed were eliminated. At Interplay, some bright person must have said, "Let's do that for chess!" The result was Battle Chess, an in-your-face chess game a generation ahead of the competition. The chess algorithm may not be as strong as Interplay's own Checkmate, but the interface is phenomenal.

Each piece is rendered exquisitely in VGA. But the real beauty is in the moving and taking of pieces. A castle transforms itself into a rocky monster, which trods across the field, picks up a pawn (a fully animated pikeman), and tosses the broken figure to the ground. A queen confronts a knight and claps her hands, and lightning reduces the knight to ashes. A bishop pounds his staff on the enemy piece until it crumples. All this is accompanied by digitized sounds of clanging armor, screams, and the associated furor of battle. This visually stunning game makes old chess players want to play again, and makes newcomers eager to learn.

Battle Chess's modem feature requires a Hayes-compatible unit, and though the connect procedure isn't addressed in the manual itself, it's listed on the game's reference card. Players must initialize their respective modems by entering control codes: *ATS0=1* for the answering modem, and *ATD (phone)* for the dialing

Illustration by RANDY ENOS

modem. To hang up, you enter specific codes found on the reference card. Though less automated than in

Animation and digitization bring Battle Chess to life.

Knights of the Sky, the modem-to-modem procedure in Battle Chess is still relatively simple.

Those Incredible Men and Their Flying Machines

MicroProse's **Knights of the Sky** puts you in the cockpit of a World War I fighter plane. Though not as technically advanced as its newer competitor, Dynamix's Red Baron, Knights offers arguably smoother game play, head-to-head options, and excellent documentation.

A WWI flight simulator is especially appropriate for modem play, as combat is up-close and personal. An F-16 can acquire a target miles away and let fly some smart missile before the pilot even sees the enemy, but *mano á mano* combat — even over the modem — makes sense in something like Knights of the Sky, because you can down someone only at close range.

Knights offers basic external-view options, but lacks some of the sophistication of Dynamix's Red Baron. Clouds are two-dimensional; you fly either above or below them. In single-player mode, you fly only Allied planes, and you fly all your missions solo, unless it's an escort mission. You'll find more ground detail than in Red Baron, though, and flight dynamics are simpler in Knights, as well. Turning a WWI fighter should make your plane lose lift, something noticeable in Red Baron, where constant turning would plow your fighter into the ground. In Knights, turns eventually let you get behind your computer-controlled enemies and shoot them down.

This simplicity actually makes Knights more enjoyable than Red Baron in some respects. As for its computer-controlled German opponents, they don't match up to the aces of Red Baron (though the Dynamix pilots are by no means unbeatable).

Knights of the Sky sports the simplest connection procedure of these three games — much like using a basic terminal program. It prompts you to select the COM port and the baud rate, then asks you to choose one of three options: *wait for call*, *answer immediately*, and *initiate call*. *Wait for call* is self-explanatory: Presumably, your nemesis will call you, with one hand typing out your phone number and the other hand on the throttle of his Fokker. If you're already on the phone with your opponent, you can pick *answer* immediately to connect the modems before you hang up the voice line. To initiate a telephone call, just type your opponent's phone number, and if his or her computer is waiting for your

Knights of the Sky: A smooth ride for flight-simulator enthusiasts.

call, the systems connect. All in all, the connect routine is less painful than those you'll find in many a telecommunications package.

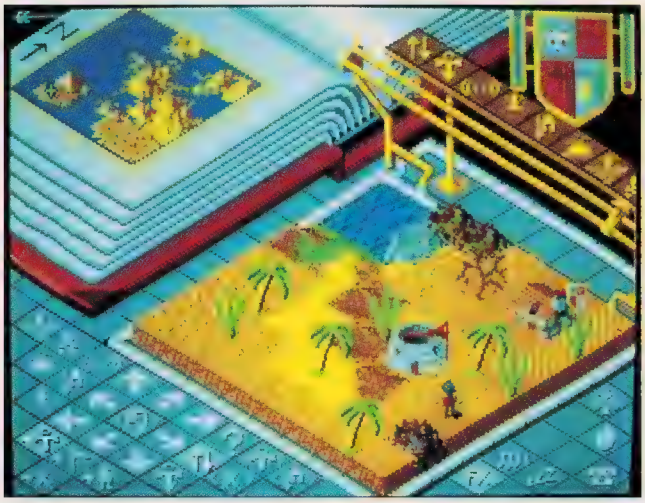
God of Silicon

A game that drew attention from such unlikely places as *The New York Times*, Populous takes SimCity one better. Rather than set you up as an autocratic mayor, Populous puts you in the Driver's seat. You play God by controlling the physical world of your believers, making life easy or hard to increase the number of your worshipers, and thereby your power. Nonbelievers are apocalypse fodder. Your opponent, a rival deity, also cares for his flock and tries to wreak havoc with yours. What makes you good and your enemy evil? Nothing. Populous offers moral relativity at its most lighthearted.

As a godhead, you're responsible for terraforming the land; flat land is best for civilization, and your civilization advances more rapidly if conditions are favorable. You must also tend to the safety and fruitfulness of your people, especially your High Priestess, leader of your earthbound personality cult. Without her, your people are aimless. The more people worship you, the more manna you receive, and the more power you have to spread around in the form of disasters aimed at infidels. For the ultimate in silicon power trips, you can create berserk knights who roam off to ravage

enemy lands. It's dangerous, but very, very entertaining.

Populous' interface sports icons ranged around the



Who'll build a better world in Populus — you or your opponent?

map, with each icon corresponding to an individual god-like function. The interface works best with a mouse; it's elegant, intuitive, and surprisingly easy to master. Instructions for dialing and connecting to your opponent are clear, and similar to those for Knights of the Sky. The head-to-head option even features a computer-aided function to help you make decisions.

What's the Catch?

The first rough spot in playing modem-to-modem games is finding someone to play against, preferably someone only a local call away. You have several options. The first is to contact the game's publisher and see if the company maintains a list of potential opponents, either on the premises or on an on-line service. Spectrum HoloByte, for instance, keeps a list of such modem gamers. The second, and by far the most effective, option is to connect to a service such as CompuServe, which maintains an *Opponents Wanted* message board. You can search this list by game title and area code, and get in touch with players via e-mail. Some computer-game magazines print a "wanted list" for games and opponents. Such lists are usually two to three months old, though, and because they're so brief, the chances of finding someone in your area code are slim.

What about the technical details? I had no trouble making or receiving modem calls and playing over the telephone — something I attribute to the more-or-less standard Hayes-style modems with which most PCs are equipped. Playing an opponent who's not using a PC, though, may be difficult. An Amiga running Battle Chess may not connect to a PC running the same game (though, admittedly, I never found a non-IBM challenger).

The only difficulty you may have is playing via the CompuServe forum with CompuServe Information Manager, a front-end program that logs you onto CompuServe. In my case, the software needed some tweaking before I could coax it into exiting the program without dropping the carrier. Once the carrier was active through CompuServe, I ran Knights of the Sky and selected the *Connect Directly* option, normally reserved for computers hooked up via serial cable. This arrangement worked well, with only a slight loss of speed.

Dial Up, Play Hard, Hang Up

Knights of the Sky put me into the cockpit of a WWI fighter. Triplanes and biplanes were the order of the day. After a bit of solo practice, I called up Mark, my local opponent. He'd done this before, so he explained game etiquette to the newcomer.

Because the planes start off flying toward each other, you don't open fire during the first pass — you'd probably both end up as flaming wrecks. It was a thrill knowing that my opponent was a thinking, breathing person. This was virtual reality, a modern-day cyberspace — unfortunately not a transparent reality, for Knights' real-time game play suffered most from the 2400-baud connection, and slowed noticeably.

Anachronistically, you can communicate with your opponent. All three games have a chat feature that lets you send messages. I swore that Mark did this to distract me from time to time, but I got used to it — WWI flying involves much stalking and maneuvering, and relatively little gunfire. There's enough time to send and read brief messages back and forth without the chats getting unmanageable. Still, sending messages proved too much in the beginning, as I tried to get comfortable with Knights' flight dynamics.

You might feel the urge to wave to your opponent during your first fly-by, but control it. Mark was on my tail and downed me repeatedly. I managed a couple of kills eventually, but it was clear that he was the better pilot. Knights has its own head-to-head scoring system: two points for shooting down your opponent, one if he or she crashes, minus one if you crash. I won't even mention our scores. All in all, modem-to-modem play in Knights of the Sky was loads of fun.

My ego suffered even more indignities in Populous. Strangely enough, though Populous has been around for some time, finding an opponent was more difficult and required some long-distance canvassing. When I finally found Josh, he was more than up to the task of demonstrating how pathetic a deity I played. Who said omnipotence was easy? I got whipped soundly.

Populous is ripe for good strategy and practiced improvisation. The game makes efficient use of time — spent among tending your lands, watching over your leader, and keeping tabs on your enemy's progress. Though the interface is simple enough to use, those split-second tactical decisions are tough. Populous was by

far the most exciting game to play modem to modem. A real-time strategic game with such a wonderfully elegant interface is perfect with a human opponent — even if he or she is the better player.

But even with the help of my computer adviser, Josh beat me repeatedly. Listening to chat mode was eavesdropping on godspeak. "How did you like that flood? Your followers didn't seem too pleased!" I played the evil side, and though there's no advantage, it lent atmosphere to the conflict. I sure didn't regret that earthquake I sent down on those pagans.

The 2400-baud modem speed doesn't really limit play in Populous, for there's plenty of dead time during game play — time spent checking the various parts of your world and your opponent's lands. The rule of thumb in modem-to-modem play should be that any game played in real time (such as simulators) benefits from faster transmission speeds. No big surprise there.

Finally, I took a turn at Battle Chess. Finding an opponent was no problem. I was once a pretty good chess player, and though it's been quite a while since I'd last played, I thought I had a pretty good feel for the game. My opponent, Doug, was like me — he'd played before, but hadn't recently. Our contests were long, with no clear winner (except the telephone company — our bills were high).

Playing Battle Chess was, in some ways, more fun than playing chess with physical pieces. Battle Chess removes the abstraction from the game. You tend to appreciate your pieces more when you see them as living, walking, screaming beings. But despite the spectacular animation, Battle Chess gained the least from head-to-head play. Not that it wasn't fun — the head-to-head element just wasn't new.

Obviously, modem speed and lag time aren't factors in a game in which most play time is spent deciding on your next move, or waiting for your opponent. In fact, Battle Chess supports only 300-baud play. The game's slow modem-to-modem mode stems from its elaborate animation. You may get tired of watching a rook trudge across the board and pound the opposing bishop slowly into the ground. One way to speed things up is to switch to the more traditional two-dimensional chessboard.

Busy Signal

The trick to playing others in modem-to-modem games is to beat the computer first. Almost any opponent will be at least that good. Then find another player of equal skill, or at least one you're willing to grow with. You'll find that you adapt quickly to each other's strategy, and savor victory so much more.

Of the three games I dialed down, Populous and Battle Chess require the most from you before modem-to-modem play becomes profitable. Most people who want to play these two games over the wire will have a good grasp of tactics. If you want your telephone time well spent, you should be experienced, as well. Knights of the Sky's learning curve may be steeper, but you can master the basic elements of flying enough to give even a seasoned vet a good run for his or her money.

Several other games are popular among modem-to-modem gamers, by the way. Both MicroProse's **Command HQ** and Spectrum Holobyte's **Falcon AT** have hordes of eager players, and are worth checking out. Why don't you give them a try?

In the Future

And what does the future hold? As modem prices fall and 9600 baud becomes the *de facto* standard, more and more information can be exchanged at faster rates, allowing smoother and more detailed game play over the telephone. More and more games are incorporating head-to-head and modem-to-modem play. Spectrum's **Falcon 3.0** is an excellent example, for it will let two players fly or fight together in a joint mission in the same virtual reality.

The day when head-to-head fantasy role-play games feature cooperative and competitive telephone play isn't far away, either. Imagine exploring dungeons with a group of real people scattered from Alaska to Arkansas. Maybe you'll make some interesting new friends, too.

Today, the injection of the human element into games such as Populous, Battle Chess, and Knights of the Sky literally breathes new life into them. I'll be waiting by the phone. Hope to hear from your computer soon. ❑

PRODUCT INFORMATION

Battle Chess

Interplay Productions
3710 South Susan
Suite 1000
Santa Ana, CA 92704
(714) 549-2411
$49.95
512K IBM PC or compatible
640K for VGA
CGA, EGA, VGA

Populous

Electronic Arts
1820 Gateway Drive
San Mateo, CA 94404
(415) 571-7171
$49.95
512K IBM PC or compatible
CGA, EGA, VGA,
Tandy 16-color

Knights of the Sky

MicroProse
180 Lakefront Road
Hunt Valley, MD 21030
(301) 771-1151
CGA, EGA, VGA
640K IBM PC or compatible
286 minimum recommended

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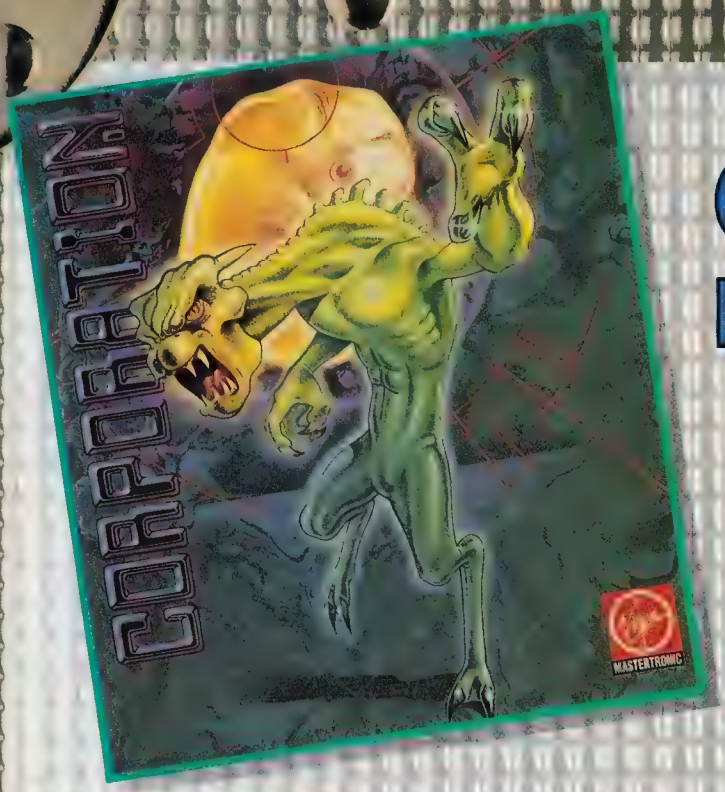

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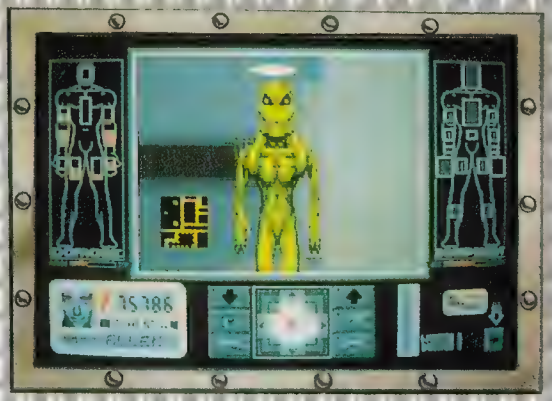

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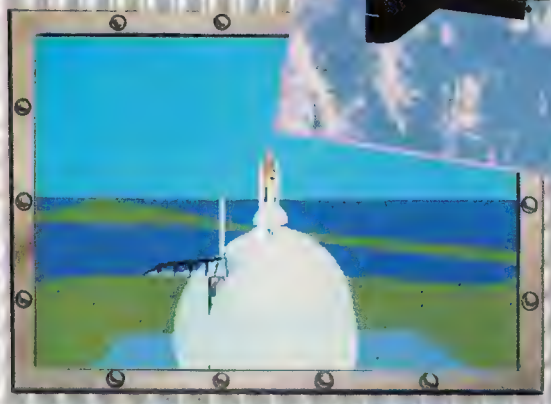

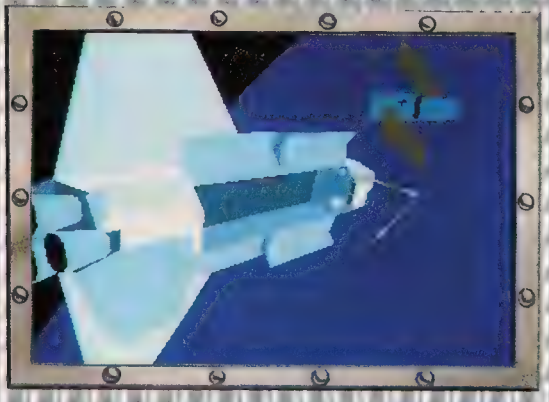

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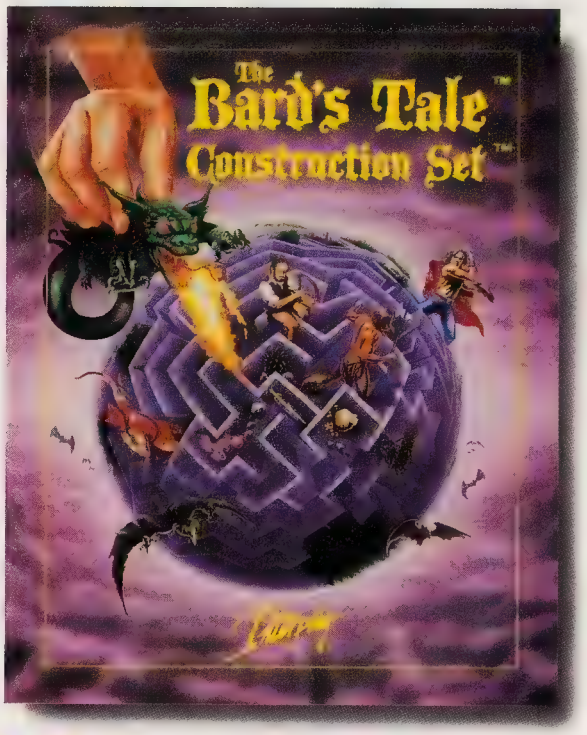

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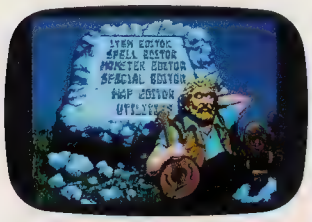

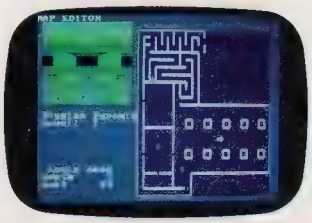

MS-DOS Screens Pictured.

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MIKE DITKA'S ULTIMATE FOOTBALL

PLAYMAKER FOOTBALL

By Cameron Crotty

THE PACKAGES CAME IN THE AFTERNOON mail. Nothing fancy — just some nondescript folders and disks spattered with death's-head beta-test notices. *Do not distribute under penalty of pain*. I'm used to it. I'm a trained professional. I test software.

I tossed the stuff in two piles on the table, and, as it hit, the photocopied documentation slithered out: Mike Ditka's Ultimate Football from Accolade, and Broderbund's Playmaker — two football games with *attitudes*. I grunted and clawed off the top of the first of many bottles of beer. This would be a long night.

I hit the power switch, and my PC lit up like a halfback coming out of a two-point stance. A couple of seconds later, I was staring at a digitized replica of Mike Ditka's ugly mug, and wondering when he would lose those stupid sunglasses.

Ultimate Football

Previewing software means just that: You get to see something before it's computer-consumer ready, and you promise not to say bad things about the package because it's not done yet. Like I said, I can handle it. I'm a trained professional.

Only a couple of parts of Mike Ditka's Ultimate Football were working properly, but I saw enough to be impressed. Choosing to play an exhibition game brings up a full 28-team roster from which you select two teams. You can be a player in the trenches and let the computer coach, sit in the owner's box and call in your favorite plays, or both.

The animation is detailed and relatively smooth, and you can watch and play from a few different viewing angles. For extra spice, veteran NFL referee Jim Tunney makes frequent digitized appearances.

Mike Ditka's Ultimate Football
Get as deep or as shallow as you want — you can use predefined teams or create the characteristics of each player yourself.
Detailed graphics images make you feel part of the game.

The beauty of Ditka (the game, not the guy) is that it lets you get as deep or stay as shallow as you want, and still have fun. You can extend your control down to the strength and agility of each player, or you can use the predefined teams and just throw the ball around. The final version of Ultimate Football will come with preset plays, but the playbook editor is colorful and easy to use; there's even a practice/drill option for trying out your latest brainstorm. If you want the whole enchilada, you'll be able to create your own leagues and teams, then run them through a real 17-week season, including a Super Bowl.

Lookin' Good

Mike Ditka's Ultimate Football could prove to be the perfect blend of strategy and action for the armchair quarterback. The graphics displays are detailed and convincing, the action should satisfy any twitchy-fingered arcade hound, and the playmaking and calling options are plentiful without being overwhelming. Although many sports games do require hours of playing time and experimentation for you to enjoy them, Accolade's package promises to be entertaining whether you want to just play a quick scrimmage or create a team from the ground up.

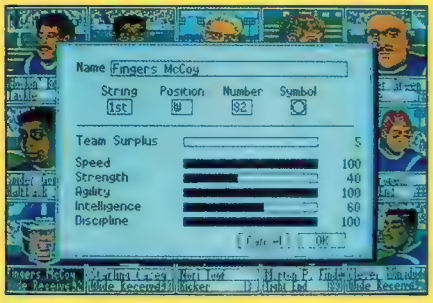
Make the Play

Playmaker Football from Broderbund has been available on the Macintosh for some time now, where it stands out as the best (meaning the only) football game available. Rather

than rewrite code from the ground up, Broderbund is porting the game over to IBM in basically the same format. It's important to remember that Playmaker isn't your typical football game, but rather a coaching simulator. You can take control of a player on the field, but sparse and choppy animation, awkward controls, and a Goodyear Blimp overhead view make it almost certain that you'll do more harm than good. This is a game for the brain, not the fingers.

Playmaker Football

Here's one for the brain, not the fingers — choppy animation makes it more of a coaching simulator than a typical football game.



You have endless possibilities for creating teams and strategies.

What it lacks in live action, Playmaker more than makes up for in strategic possibilities. The package ships with ready-to-run teams and playbooks, but if you're a real aficionado (with plenty of time to kill) you can create your own team from the ground up. And I mean from scratch — the possibilities are almost unbelievable.

Each player on your roster has five ability scores, ranging from *Strength* to *Agility* to *Discipline*. You allocate points to each player from a team total. You can't make each player a superstar, so you must choose carefully, considering what kinds of offensive and defensive strategies you want to employ. Do you want an unstoppable aerial attack? Better load up your wide receivers. Like to grind out yardage foot by foot? Go for a monster front line, but don't forget your defense.

Once you've groomed your players, you can start working on your plays. Here again, the options are staggering. In addition to the standard player-movement tools, you have a choice of five different offensive blocks, four different ways for a defensive player to read an offensive play as it develops, plus pump fakes, play-action fakes, timed pass patterns, detailed zone and man-to-man coverages, strong side/weak side adjustments, and about anything else you can think of.

When you're ready to take your team and playbook into a game, you can either call plays yourself or hand the coaching duties to the computer. Playmaker lets you (with a surprisingly simple dialog-box interface) rate each play in your playbook by *Priority*, *Yards to Go*, *Field Position*, *Game Time*, and *Score* difference. These ratings become a set of rules that a primitive artificial intelligence (AI) follows.

Your AI coach takes your instructions and carries them out, evaluating results and modifying its play-calling strategy as the game progresses, again in accordance with the rules you define. At this level, Playmaker becomes a football programming environment. Some on-line services even have leagues with weekly games. Over the course of a season you can scout the other teams by watching their games, then modifying your playbook and AI coach to take advantage of their weaknesses.

With my testing now complete, I chopped the power on my PC and listened to the juice ebb from the machine. The room was a mess. Crumpled scraps of paper covered with failed play diagrams lay everywhere. Black lines covered my monitor from my Madden-like diagramming phase. A pile of shattered glass lay in the corner: I'd been using beer bottles to figure out pass pattern timings. But it was all for nought. My defense was a shambles, and my offense thought that catching the ball was optional. As I nodded off, I raised my fist and mumbled, "Wait 'til next year!"

Mike Ditka's Ultimate Football, Accolade, 550 South Winchester Blvd., San Jose, CA 95128, (408) 985-1700; IBM PC or compatible, 10MHz or faster recommended; 640K RAM; VGA, MCGA, EGA, Tandy 16-color; supports Roland, AdLib sound boards; keyboard, joystick, or mouse; $54.95

Playmaker Football, Broderbund Software, 17 Paul Drive, San Rafael, CA 94903-2101, (415) 492-3200; IBM PC or compatible; 540K RAM; VGA, MCGA, EGA, Tandy, CGA and Hercules monochrome; supports Roland MT-32, LAPC-1, CM-32L, Sound Blaster, AdLib, Tandy DAC, Tandy three-voice, IBM PS/1 sound boards; keyboard, joystick, or mouse; $49.95

THE ADVENTURES OF WILLIE BEAMISH

By Peter Olafson

THERE'S BUGS IN DYNAMIX'S THE Adventures of Willie Beamish. Not bugs, but *Bugs* — rabbit of the fluffy tail, sadistic disposition, and Brooklyn accent. There's evidence of Disney and inhabitants of Japanese-made cartoons, too, and perhaps just a suggestion of those velvet paintings of children with eyes that go down to their knees.

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This new adventure — which uses an extension of the game engine behind Rise of the Dragon and Heart of China — features a foundation of classic animation, something that quickly fractures it from its more realistic predecessors. Willie Beamish is the first full-fledged interactive cartoon — and it's a charming beginning.

Required: Free Saturday Mornings

Were Chuck Jones and Tex Avery executive producers? Young Willie doesn't simply walk from the room — he peels out, leaving a streak of color behind him. Spider, the resident bully, doesn't simply beat up Willie; instead, he compresses our hero into a basketball-sized lump, a lump with worried eyes, actually, and then launches a jump shot. Or maybe he picks him up off the ground — Willie's legs spinning as if on a windup toy — and punches him through a door.

They should add a note to the product requirements: *Must be played on Saturday mornings.*

The term *animated adventure* carries some baggage with it, and in this respect Willie B's not quite what you'd expect from someone in the Sierra family; it doesn't offer full character control. As in Rise of the Dragon and Heart of China, you can't plant your character wherever you please; instead you direct him to an exit or an operable object.

There's no shortage of places and objects, however. The detail that contributed so much to Heart of China is in full play here. Send Willie to his room. Indeed, explore the whole overstuffed house — and be sure to visit the bathroom when his older sister's in the tub — and have him play a ridiculous junk-food game on his Nintari console. Send him to the attic and play with the trains. Crash 'em? Definitely. Reset your sister's scale. Go nuts. You're at home.

The VGA art is simply lovely. The shots of this community — the Beamishes are sandwiched between a house filled with radon gas and a house with a shotgun-toting dad — wouldn't have looked out of place in some 1950s magazine espousing suburban living. The game's graphics images have that slightly faded, feathery, post-war touch.

When dealing with other characters — your family or treehouse pals Dana and Perry — austere still lifes appear over these backdrops, along with a dialogue box and, sometimes, a choice of snotty things to say. If the little monster plays his cards right, and ticks the right people off, you'll see not a few story branches.

The sound? Can't say. This uncompressed alpha version of Willie Beamish (spread over eight high-density disks) was missing music and sound effects. Continuity was iffy in spots. But the core of the game was intact, and that, and what revolved around it, was delightful even in this under-construction form. Dynamix intends Willie Beamish as a game for young people — the main objective seems to be to get him to the Nintari championships — that also appeals to adults. While this early version runs a little cute in spots, overall these folks are dead on target.

Besides, you need to let Willie Beamish grow on you. *Day One,* in which the story is set up, seems pretty mundane, and it's easy to leave with the impression that Willie Beamish will be very much a children's game. Willie, staying after school, is scolded by his curmudgeonly teacher. He can try to sneak out — and naturally he stays longer when he's caught. He walks the dog (or doesn't walk the poor dog), plays with his precocious sister Brianna (or plays too rough, and takes heat for it) and helps his mom in the kitchen. What a nice boy.

The Adventures of Willie Beamish

This game may seem as though it's for kids, but Willie's antics are designed to tickle adult funny bones.

Willie Beamish offers adventure but lacks full character control.

Enjoy the slightly faded, post-war touch to the graphics images.

One Weird Little Family

I bet you're thinking, "What is this — learn-to-be-good software for kids 4 to 8? When's Ultima VII coming out?" But wait: Pretty soon you start noticing things — little things.

Willie's mom dresses like a refugee from a '60s beach-party movie, and can get a sort of maniacal look in her eye when pressed. Her husband, who

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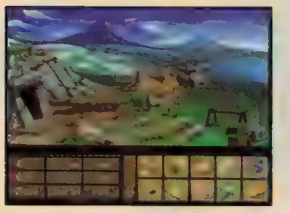
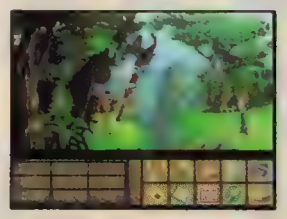
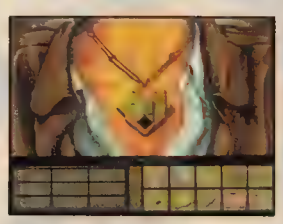
INDIANA JONES™ and the FATE of ATLANTIS



Iceland. The start of a new chapter in the history of Atlantis.



Indy and Sophia cross many paths on the way to rediscovering the lost continent.



The ancient necklace hides many mysteries from the past.

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expects a promotion and winds up getting canned, looks like a bespectacled version of Ed Bundy from *Married with Children*. When Willie cuts his finger with a Ginsu knife, we're treated to his spurting blood. Willie's frog's name is "Horny."(You gotta know that means trouble.) And there are a staggering number of TV sets in the house.

This is one weird little family. And the day isn't even over.

It gets better on *Day Two*. At a pizzeria, Willie will . . . well, break wind. Twice, if you command him. Over in the next booth, a smirking guy seems to be trying to coax a pretty girl into something naughty. She's having none of it. The school nurse hides a dirigible under her blouse. The local creep house is home to a certain angular-faced woman named Leona, who's married to a guy named Harry. (But don't make any rash guesses, mmmm?)

And I'll let you find out about the babysitter for yourself.

Dynamix/Sierra On-Line, P.O. Box 485, Coarsegold, CA 93614, (800) 326-6654); IBM PC or compatible, 12 MHz or faster recommended; 540K RAM; EGA, VGA, Tandy 16-color; supports AdLib, Sound Blaster, Roland MT-32, LAPC-1, CM-32L, PS/1 sound boards; requires hard-disk drive; mouse recommended; $59.95

CIVILIZATION

By Gregg Keizer

IF THE DAWN OF CIVILIZATION WENT ANYthing like this, we should count ourselves lucky to have indoor plumbing and an alphabet. So many things could have gone wrong — from Aztecs with tanks to Babylonians with airplanes — and turned Western culture into a greasy spot on the map.

Civilization, the latest foray of Sid Meier and MicroProse into simulation territory, is nothing if not ambitious. Its shoves together, like some immense trash compactor of time, all the bits and pieces of history and technology, then hopes that it's fun, intriguing, and addicting. Right on all three counts.

Blank Maps, Elvis, and the Wonders of the World

With roots as diverse as a classic computer game and an almost unknown board game, Civilization reaches for grand scope and snares it inside your PC. The scale is planetary, the timeline measured in millennia. You take charge of a wandering prehistoric tribe — one of seven on the most advanced level — and guide it through the turmoil of making itself the greatest society this virtual reality has ever known.

The engine is remarkably simple. You start with a blank map and a single band of settlers. The rest of the world becomes clear only when you explore, a trait this game shares with the veteran Empire, a ship/armies/airplane war game of several years ago. Along the way you find cities, make armies and navies (and eventually, if all goes well, air and armored forces, too), dream up agriculture, mine ores, discover new continents, and brush up against the inevitable computer competition.

Menu driven in some places — a mouse proved necessary in this not-quite-finished version — and keyboard controlled in others, you inhabit one colorful screen, but can bounce to another display that quickly shows the status of your most vital possession, your cities.

Other screens highlight advisers' reports, let you give orders to units (which you can do more easily with the keyboard), and offer a civilization encyclopedia that's a faster reference than the game's own print documentation.

You move your units across this new world. Settlers establish cities, turn grassland into irrigated farmland, build roads and railroads, and dig mines.

Military units make up the rest of your civilization — it doesn't take long to figure out that might makes right in this world. Troops and weaponry range from the primitive legion, chariot, and trireme to the 20th century's tanks, bombers, and ICBMs.

Your culture needs protection from the occasional barbarian incursion and the more common invasion by another civilization. Only by combining resources and technological advances can you move up the arms ladder.

To build ironclads, for instance, you need steam engines, which can be machined only when you have the necessary advances in physics and invention under your belt. Those, in turn, come out of discoveries in mathematics and navigation, and

Civilization

We note that your primitive civilization
has not achieved Bronze Working.
Perhaps you would care to exchange
knowledge with us?"
• Buzz off

Exploration is a key tactic in forming your society.

Screens display the status of your cities and your advisers' reports, so keep a close eye on them.

Build An Empire To Stand The Test Of Time

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Perhaps you would care to exchange
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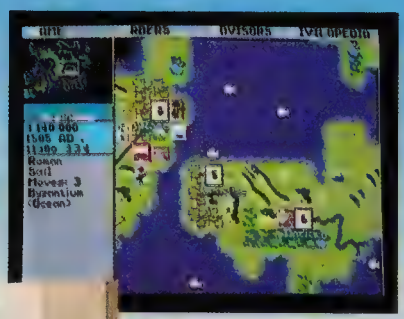

Rout Ramses... Outwit Alexander... Knockout Napoleon... History is littered with the bones of great men who thought their achievements would live forever. Now you can succeed where they failed as MicroProse brings you Sid Meier's **Civilization.** Guide a culture from its earliest stages, through agricultural and industrial revolutions, all the way to your own Space Age. Survive and dominate by outmaneuvering mankind's most legendary leaders. Carve your name indelibly in the pages of history. With Sid Meier's **Civilization,** you really can build a brave new world.

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in engineering and literacy. The path continues back in time this way, with discoveries and advances intertwined.

Leave My People Alone

No simple war game is Civilization, though. You can choose your form of government, build *Wonders of the World*, and entertain your people by building Elvises, tiny Kings that keep them smiling. Who said civilization had no humor?

By allocating the resources your cities produce and playing with the tax rate, you can find the money to move beyond simple survival. Create diplomats to make treaties with (and to spy on) other cultures. Build caravans to conduct peaceful trade. Finally, you must climb out of brutality and ignorance long enough to manufacture space ships that will take your population to the stars and you to the end of the game.

From hunter-gatherers to star-farers, you have them all on one hard-disk drive.

Civilization may be a one-player simulation, but there's plenty of competition from the computer. Depending on the level at which you play (you have five to choose from), your foes will play it dumb or attack like rabid Prussians. At anything but the easiest level, expect a tough road to space.

In fact, if Civilization has any fault, it's the speed with which your budding culture can slide into disaster. Unexpected barbarians or an invasion fleet can materialize suddenly along a city or a coast, descend on you like locusts, and leave just an empty husk behind. Save your simulation regularly if you want to see liftoff.

Other complaints are inherent in a game that tries to mimic politics, religion, and the advancement of civilization. Industrialization leads to pollution, technology can too easily degenerate into a blatant arms race, and government styles are oversimplified. Some may argue that the underlying design decisions smack of political correctness.

Another interpretation is that they were made on the side of game play and entertainment. No argument there. Civilization sounds more tiresome in description than it is to play.

If aspirations were the only judge of a computer game, Civilization would win hands down. But because taking a walk through history with this game is so addictive and so much fun, Civilization must be on anyone's Top Ten list of PC games for '91. ❑

MicroProse Software, 180 Lakefront Drive, Hunt Valley, MD 21030, (301) 771-1151; IBM PC or compatible; 640K RAM; EGA, MCGA, VGA, Tandy 16-color; supports AdLib, Roland MT32, Sound Blaster sound boards; requires hard-disk drive; mouse recommended; $59.95 (EGA, MCGA, Tandy), $69.95 (VGA)

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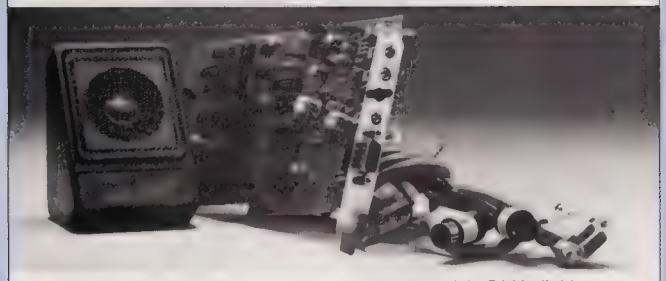

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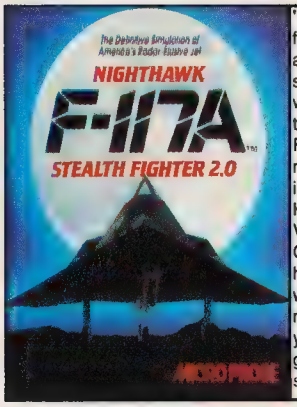

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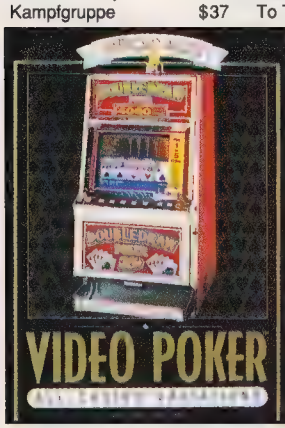

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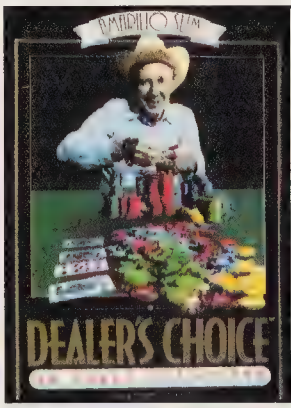

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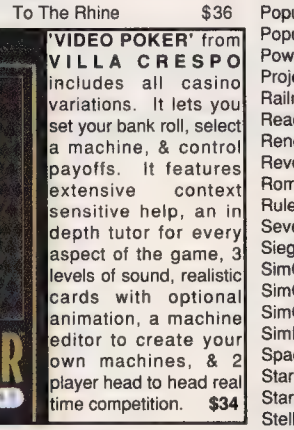

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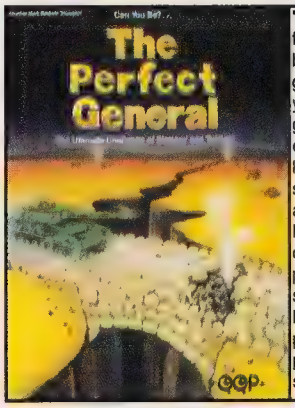

'PERFECT GENERAL' from **QQP INC** is a turn based ground war game. Features 12 years of play testing, great maps in VGA, easy to use mouse or keyboard interface, 14 scenarios, very strong artificial intelligence, hidden movement, line of sight option, in depth player ranking system, saves your career history as you play, 2 player option, modem play, sound board support. **$34**

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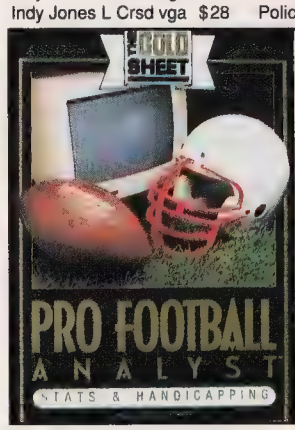

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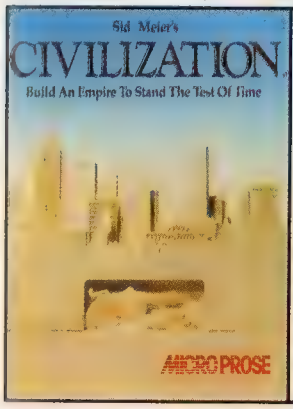

'CIVILIZATION' from **MICROPROSE** "is a competitive multi-player strategy game with a great deal of replayability" **CGW.** You explore cities, continents, and the world in an **EMPIRE** like way. You make economic decisions priotizing technological growth in order to advance more rapidly than the other players. Sort of a cross betweeen **SIMCITY** & **EMPIRE.** **$37**

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'ACTION STATIONS' by **RAW SOFTWARE** is a naval suface combat simulation. This game covers 1922 to 45 in amazing detail. Features 21 status displays, 30 scenarios in the Atlantic, Med and Pacific, subordinate comanders, treatment of smoke, starshells, flares, radar, weather, shore batteries, aircraft spotting & more. Ships are modeled in detail. This is the premier WW2 naval game. **$29**

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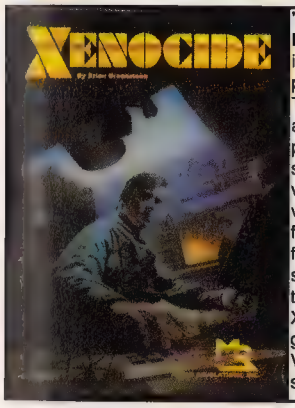

'XENOCIDE' from **MICRO REVELATIONS** is a fast paced arcade puzzle strategy game. This is an all in one arcade game with first person 3D view simulator, profile side view, and top down view. Three moons with four levels each require fast reflexes and sound strategy/puzzle solving to obliterate the Xenomorphs. Good graphics in 256 color VGA with sound board support. **$29**

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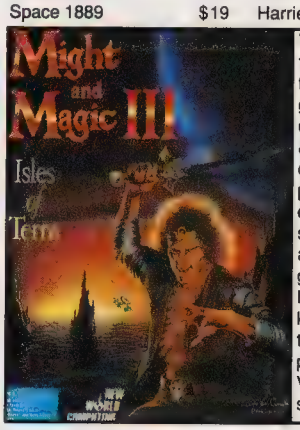

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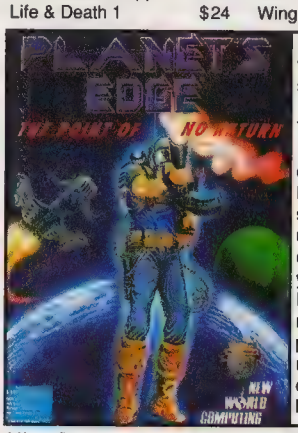

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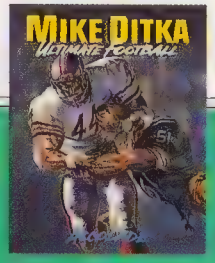

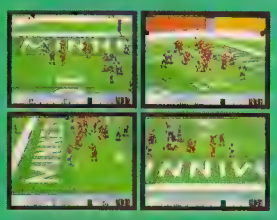

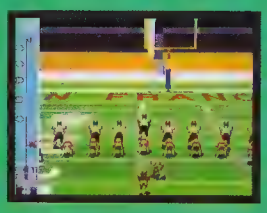

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XENOCIDE

By James V. Trunzo

The three moons circling your home planet are just baleful eyes now. No romance, no moonlight, no staring up at the three disks and imagining what the future may bring.

You know the future, and it's hell. Ever since the Xenomorphs began breeding on the moons, you, and everyone else, can only wonder when they'll head your way. Someone's got to erase, eradicate, and eliminate the little monsters. And you thought gypsy moths were a problem!

That's the premise behind Micro Revelations' frantically paced, ever-challenging arcade adventure game Xenocide. Multiple skill levels, various viewing modes, high-resolution graphics, and intriguing puzzles put Xenocide several notches above the average snap-and-shoot arcade game. The action begins as soon as you start playing, and it never stops.

Each of the three moons contains four levels you must negotiate successfully before you can destroy the moon and its occupying Xenomorphs. The first level finds you in a hovercraft, careening across the moon's surface, avoiding giant bugs and rocky outcroppings as you look for the entrance to the docking station that takes you to level 2.

Once inside the subterranean cavern of level 2, you must locate five bombs hidden within its underground maze. Propelled by a jet pack, you fight your way past hordes of creatures, always looking for the bombs. Level 3 is somewhat similar, though the playing field shifts to an underwater motif. Trading your jet pack for scuba-diving gear, you must now find the keys that will unlock the doors leading to the final level on the moon, the labyrinth bio lab.

Level 4's bio lab represents each moon's biggest challenge. You must find a path to the center of the lab, plant the bombs you found on level 2, and get to a teleporter before they explode. More Xenomorphs live on level 4 than any other, and the action doubles as you're attacked from all sides.

No rest for the weary, though, for if you make it this far, you must head for the next two moons and the eight remaining levels immediately. All moons are identical in theme and structure; with some subtle differences, the only thing that changes from moon to moon is the difficulty level.

Xenocide's high-resolution graphics images help make this arcade game better than many of its genre.

Action!

Xenocide moves to the head of the arcade class by dropping tidbits of strategy within all its frenetic action.

On level 1, for instance, you must collect canisters that determine how much ammunition you can carry. The more ammunition you have, the longer you can explore an area without having to go back to reload. Refueling requirements on levels 2 and 3 force you to think through a plan of attack. Add all this to the puzzles built into Xenocide and you have a game that makes you think as well as react.

Xenocide's graphics presentation is also a drawing card. Its three different viewing modes (*3-D*, *profile*, and *overhead*) add to Xenocide's diversity. Other graphics highlights include watching hi-res bugs splat across your windshield, seeing your scuba diver sink slowly , and watching the terrific and satisfying explosion when you complete a segment and destroy a moon. These graphics images are not only esthetically pleasing, but also functionally important: Too many bugs on the windshield reduce your visibility, and letting your diver sink to the bottom eats up both time and oxygen.

If Xenocide has any chinks in its armor, it's that it can be frustratingly difficult for new players. This game has a learning curve that demands perseverance; the impatient won't stick with it long enough to discover the necessary winning techniques. But play it repeatedly — a commonplace arcade-game tactic, after all — and you'll pick up the tricks you need.

Xenocide has all the elements of a great arcade game: diversity, smooth animation, superb graphics and sound, and a tough but ultimately fair challenge. Strap on your blaster and get ready to fight: They're billing this one as *High Noon on the Moon*!

Micro Revelations, P.O. Box 70430, Reno, NV 89580, (800) 442-6002; IBM PC or compatible; 512K RAM; CGA, EGA, Tandy 16-color, 256-color VGA, MCGA; supports AdLib, CMS, Covox, Game Blaster, Sound Blaster, Roland sound boards, Tandy three-voice sound; joystick recommended; $44.95

THEME PARK MYSTERY

By Wes Nihei

Things were never stranger at the Magic Canyon Theme Park. Its four theme worlds — Yesterdayland, Dragonland, Dreamland, and Futureland — stand quiet as a graveyard. The place is cursed, you see, and it's apparently overrun with gremlins. When the previous owner, your uncle, investigated the mystery, he was driven to suicide. Now paying customers are just a faint memory and the staff has quit from fear. Worse yet, you've just inherited the place.

Theme Park Mystery is an entertaining *whatdunnit* game from Konami that tests your fingers' dexterity more than it challenges your sleuthing skills. Although there's obviously a mystery here to solve, the game is overwhelmingly arcade action. Before you can exorcise the Park's terrors you must successfully explore Magic Canyon's theme lands to find eight gremlins, reveal clues, and pick up assorted items.

Arcade veterans will recognize quickly the variations on some classic game styles. The bulk of the action is spread among side-view, horizontally scrolling, barbarian foot stomping; overhead-view jumping and dodging; and forward-view, first-person shoot-'em-up. But you also get a pachinko/pinball machine, an old-fashioned mechanical crane drop 'n' snatch game, and a mechanical dummy fortune teller. Theme Park Mystery does a good job of melding all these styles into an enjoyable adventure.

Getting started is a snap, but be prepared to decompress the program files onto a hard disk or several floppies. This game occupies a little over a megabyte of disk space. There's off-disk copy protection — password codes printed on that dark brown paper that brings tears to your eyes.

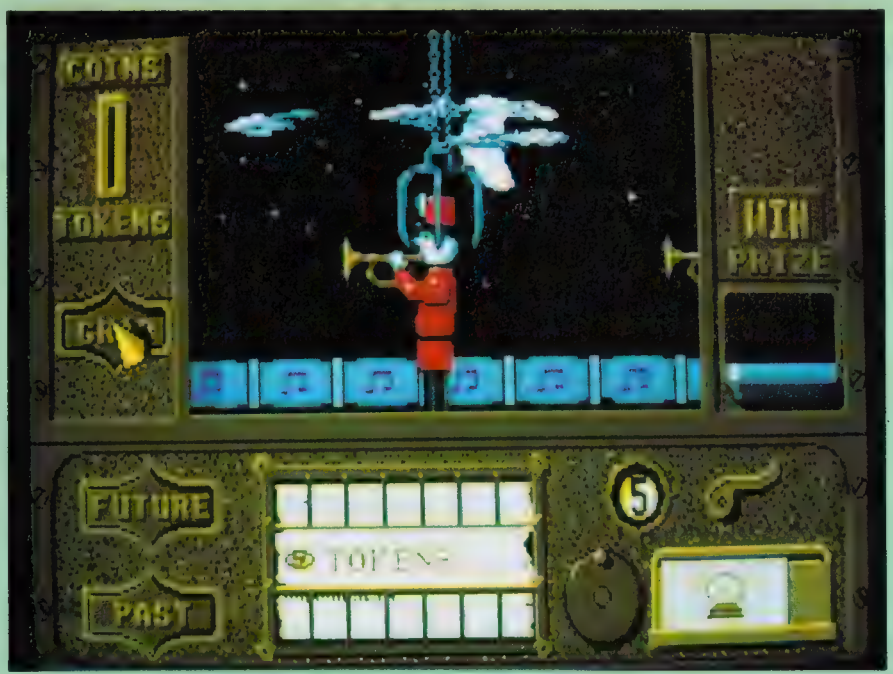
The interface is part point-and-click, part button pressing. Basic game controls and an inventory window spread out across a panel that occupies one-third of the screen.

Start Yesterday

Your adventure begins in Yesterdayland. Here you play three coin-operated game machines — Bagatelle, the pachinko/pinball machine; Grabber, the mechanical-claw game; and Zoltan, the mechanical fortune teller.

None is especially challenging, but they look great and are still fun. In Bagatelle, clicking on a lever flings steel balls up into numbered slots. Score 100 to win two tokens — and you'll need plenty to play Grabber. Grabber's claw moves slowly left to right above a line of soldiers, which moves right to left. It takes perfect timing to snatch a soldier. Playing Grabber takes patience, but one of the soldiers is a gremlin, which you must have to win. Zoltan is the game with the power. Feed a token to the turban-topped fortune teller and it dispenses helpful fortune cards, some of which are critical to advancing through the game.

You must play all three before Zoltan spits out a pass to the Monorail of



Leave your sleuthing skills behind when you enter Theme Park Mystery — it's really an arcade game.

Fear, the park's intertheme-land mass transit. Theme Park Mystery selects initial whistlestops randomly, but it usually sends you to Dragonland first. In this dark, damp dungeon world, you turn into a buffed-out barbarian. The action displays in a side-view perspective, where your character must dodge missiles thrown by assorted phantasmic creatures and negotiate deadly obstacles to capture gremlins and locate five cogs to the Dragon Ride. Only then can you escape.

Dreamland is the best-looking part of Theme Park Mystery. It's a huge psychedelic chessboard suspended between time and space. The sharp graphics images are nicely detailed and the background art is terrific. You look down at the board from a 45-degree angle as you guide your character across it. Avoid trap doors and nightmarish creatures, and find chess pieces. They turn into ornate boxes that hold several unusual items. Use them to escape Dreamland — if you can figure how they work together.

Next stop is Futureland. The Roller-creeper roller coaster is a basic first-person perspective, forward-scrolling shoot-'em-up that gives your reflexes a workout and tests your shooting eye. Be sure to catch gremlins and any non-lethal items that come flying at you.

Survive the theme lands once and you return to Zoltan for further instructions — and adventures.

Unsolved Mysteries

Theme Park Mystery sparks a few enigmas beyond those on the screen. Although it requires either a joystick or a mouse, neither the box nor the minimalist manual states clearly that you can't play with just the keyboard, a potential problem for unwary buyers.

An even more annoying omission is the absence of a game-saving feature, even though the Park is extensive and dangerous. Lose all your lives and you must restart the program, back at Yesterdayland's coin-op machines.

Theme Park Mystery is a good-looking, easy-to-play game that offers software entertainment in an enigmatic setting. Expect strategy or problem solving, though, as the title may suggest, and the mystery's on you. Come to the Park with the right attitude, and you'll enjoy the rides.

Konami, 900 Deerfield Parkway, Buffalo Grove, IL 60089, (708) 215-5100; IBM PC or compatible; 512K RAM; CGA, EGA, VGA, MCGA, Tandy 16-color; requires joystick or mouse; off-disk copy protection; $49.95

WHERE IN AMERICA'S PAST IS CARMEN SANDIEGO?

By Carol S. Holzberg

Carmen's up to no good again. The grande dame of computer crime is back, but this time she's playing with time.

Where in America's Past Is Carmen Sandiego? puts kids on the trail of Carmen and her newly recruited band of crooks in a 200-year trek through American history. As usual, Carmen and her light-fingered gang are lifting priceless treasures, this time national artifacts and cultural landmarks. San Francisco's Acme Detective Agency has again issued an appeal for crime-stopper detectives to track down the thieves and retrieve the stolen loot. With 80 cases to solve, there's plenty of mystery for everyone.

This fifth game in Broderbund's award-winning Carmen series emphasizes American regional history, folkways, political events, and culture. Yet the program delivers more than just historical facts and figures. It offers

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amusing game-like antics, plus a host of visual treats — especially if you have a VGA graphics adapter and monitor with 256-color display.

Broderbund has another winner on its hands with this Carmen Sandiego. use the keyboard, mouse, or joystick to point and shoot at on-screen buttons, and electronic messages provide helpful direction. First-time private eyes will appreciate the intuitive interface. Experienced Acme Agency gumshoes return to the agency empty-handed.

Detectives who solve cases get promoted. It takes skill and eight levels of play to make it from *Greenhorn* to *SuperScout*. Cases become more difficult with each step up the crime-stopper ladder. Only a determined few get the chance to pursue Carmen. Those who bring her to justice win an honored place in Acme's Hall of Fame.

VGA images add to the flavor in Where in America's Past Is Carmen Sandiego?

While it plays much like the other programs in the series, don't be too quick to dismiss it as a repeat of the same old formula. Greet it as you would a friend — come home for a visit.

Where's the Dam?

Reports from the field reveal that notorious criminals are on an unprecedented (and strangely historical) crime spree. No national treasure is safe. With a time-travel machine (first seen in Where in Time Is Carmen Sandiego?), they sail swiftly through the fourth dimension, filching precious American keepsakes such as the Roosevelt Dam (Arizona, 1911), the first California railroad (Sacramento, 1856), the first mailbag of the Pony Express (Missouri, 1860), Oliver Hazard Perry's warship (Michigan, 1813), and even the Tuskegee Institute (Alabama, 1881). It's up to you to round up these felons. That's the only way to ensure national security and peace of mind.

This newest episode in the series is just as easy to install and play as its predecessors. Pint-sized detectives can can probably ignore the brief documentation and jump right in.

The game's afoot when you launch ACME's *Chronoskimmer 450SL* in hot pursuit of Carmen or one of her gang. A crook may be hiding at any of 45 possible locations in one of nine time periods. To keep from wandering aimlessly through time and space, you interview witnesses, eavesdrop on conversations, and do research. A 1500-page reference, *What Happened When: A Chronology of Life and Events in America*, is included in the package, and proves invaluable in gathering clues to a crook's itinerary. An electronic map of the United States gives young sleuths the opportunity to learn more about the states in a particular region, including the date each was admitted into the Union.

As you collect data on a suspect, you record the information in the program's *Evidence Database*. Once you've gathered a sufficient number of clues to identify the thief, you can apply for an arrest warrant. Be sure of your accusations, though, for if you confront a suspect without a warrant, the crook escapes and you

Sound Off in History

Kid detectives can feast their eyes on digitized images of famous paintings, plus photographs of celebrated historical personalities, places, and events. The VGA images are impressive and add to the feeling and flavor of your time travels.

Realistic sound effects help boost your adrenaline during the chase. The game supports popular sound cards such as AdLib, Sound Blaster, Roland MT-32, and others. With one of these installed, you'll hear a rich musical score in the background as you travel the highways and byways of America's past. Even if your PC is minus a sound card, you won't be disappointed by the audio effects, tinny though they may be.

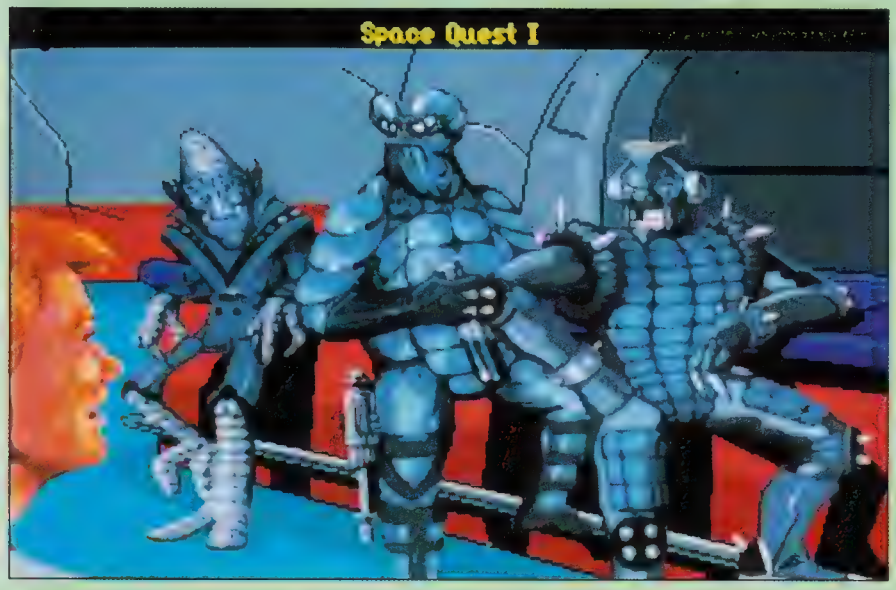
Like the other Carmen programs, Where in America's Past succeeds because it makes learning fun. Kids pick up an amazing variety of facts about American history and culture as they track suspects, and they gain valuable research experience using the information-rich pocket encyclopedia. This program is an electronic *tour de "farce"* that's a must for any school- or home-software learning library.

Broderbund Software, 17 Paul Drive, San Rafael, CA 94903-2101, (415) 492-3200; IBM PC or compatible; 640K RAM (VGA, MCGA), 512K RAM (Hercules, CGA, EGA, Tandy 16-color); Hercules, CGA, EGA, VGA, MCGA, Tandy 16-color; MS-DOS 2.11 or later; requires hard disk; supports AdLib, Sound Blaster, PS/1 Sound, Roland MT-32, LAPC-1, CM-32L sound boards, Tandy sound; off-disk copy protection; $59.95

SPACE QUEST IV

By Bernie Yee

He's back! The galaxy's best-recognized sanitation engineer turns the clock ahead with Sierra's Space Quest IV: Roger Wilco and the Time Rippers. Space Quest IV (SQ4) picks up right where its predecessor, Space Quest III, ended, complete with a stunning little sequence in which the robotic Sequel Police drag our erstwhile hero to his untimely demise, authored by Vorhaul, who's real miffed about Space Quest II. Roger is rescued by a pair of human gorillas (the Time Rippers). Hey, doesn't that Time Ripper bear just a little resemblance to Roger? If this inbred in joke sounds a bit like *The Terminator*, well, it is — kind of.



Pick up where Space Quest III ended with Space Quest IV: Roger Wilco and the Time Rippers.

Rog ends up on the bombed-out planet Xenon. What happened? The game's status line at the top of the screen says Space Quest XII: Vorhaul's Revenge II. You're caught in a future where Vorhaul has finally become Supreme Being of All That Exists. Your job? For starters, catch the Eveready Bunny, get off the streets, find out what happened to Xenon, sneak into a big, ugly tower, and hijack a timepod from the Sequel Police. It's the same save-the-future-by-going-into-the-past story that's cashed in big at America's box offices, and, as Sierra hopes, at a hard drive near you.

As Roger Wilco, your first duty is to get into an imposing tower and hijack that timepod from the police. You'll need some ingenuity and a rope. Eventually, you'll crawl into the sewers of Xenon, where you find out what happened, and what you'll have to do to get to the happy *Field of Dreams*-like ending of Space Quest IV. Action sequences are in real time, so a wrong move gets you a chestful of laser holes. The moral of this story is to save games, and save them often.

The timepod's data display is critical. You can even travel back to previous Space Quests, including episodes you never knew about. The timepods have a six-digit code for each time location. Copy down the code for each location, such as the first code you see for Space Quest XII, because you'll need to get back (ahead?) later. Travel all the way back to Space Quest I: The Sarien Encounter, and you'll find yourself in primitive CGA-like graphics (except for Roger and his timepod).

SQ4, along with King's Quest V,

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sports Sierra's new interface and graphics system, one that works best with a mouse. The VGA version of SQ4 features scrolling backgrounds made by digitizing hand-painted scenes: Sometimes when Roger walks off camera, the new screen scrolls smoothly into view in 256 glorious VGA colors. Sierra is one of the leaders in the move toward more animated-style electronic entertainment, and SQ4 demonstrates some of that trend.

SQ4 takes advantage of sound cards to play music that actually isn't annoying. Digitized sound effects add lots to the action sequences. The movement system is smart — Roger walks to the position you click on, navigating around obstacles without any help from you.

The interface is point-and-click to the max and takes all of a moment to master. If you move the pointer to the top of the screen, icons appear — *walk*, *grab*, *talk*, *smell*, and *taste*. And your cursor becomes any one of the icons, so if you click on the tongue icon, move it over to the creeping green slime, and click again, you can taste to your heart's content. Objects you find, like a jar or a rope, can be added to the icon list, too.

The writers we have to blame for SQ4, the Two Guys from Andromeda, have filled SQ4 with self-deprecating (and industry-deprecating) humor. When Roger ends up in Space Quest X: Latex Babes of Estros (and yes, they are babes), the software store in the Jetsons-like mall is filled with jabs at recognizable computer games. And don't forget to pick up the 800-page Space Quest IV hint book here!

Remember Wizard and the Princess, one of Sierra's first offerings? Well, SQ4 has about as much in common with Wizard as the early sci-fi film *A Trip to the Moon* does with *Return of the Jedi*. The evolution of Sierra's interface has distilled the system down to its simplest and most elegant form yet.

When it comes to adventure, good prose-heavy games are hard to top. Infocom text games were imaginative and innovative — in their day. SQ4 in VGA dazzles, though, by providing enough visual detail to win over even an old text-adventuring veteran. One SQ4 image is truly worth a thousand words. And, most importantly, Space Quest IV is fun.

As for the Two Guys from Andromeda, well, as Tom Waits said, they both came from good families — they just developed some ways about them that just aren't right. Lucky for us.

Sierra On-Line, P.O. Box 485, Coarsegold, CA 93614, (209) 683-4468; IBM PC or compatible, 10 MHz 286 or faster recommended; 640K RAM, supports extended memory; EGA, VGA; supports AdLib, Roland, Sound Blaster sound boards; $59.95

SOUND BLASTER PRO

By Barry Brenesal

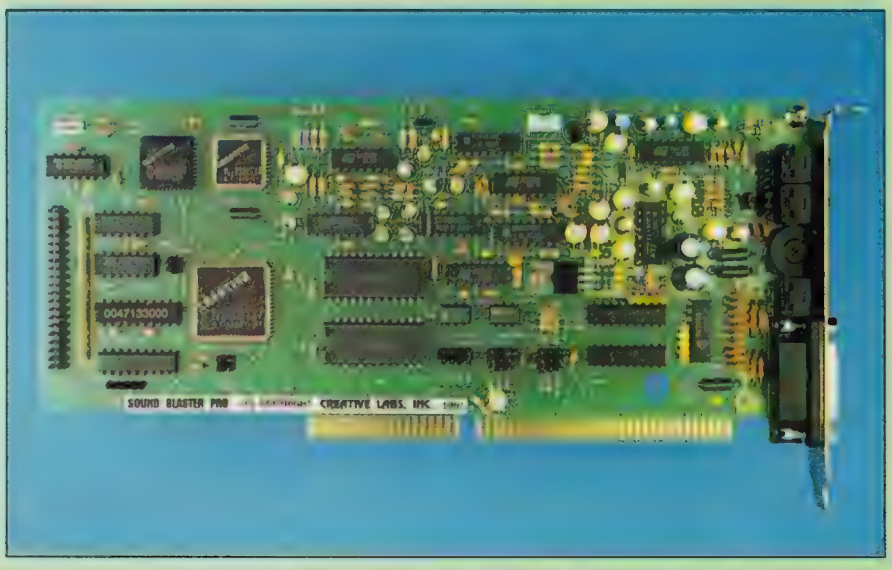
The Marines may look for a few good men, but any PC game player will gladly settle for a single good sound card: one that plays both Sound Blaster and AdLib scores, one that doesn't fry your other boards, one that never draws attention to itself, one that delivers all the sophisticated sound effects and music bundled into the latest batch of game software.

Look no further: Sound Blaster Pro does it all, and more. At $299.95 it's not cheap, but neither are its features.

Testing: One, Two . . .

Installing Sound Blaster Pro is a snap. The 16-bit card slips easily into place. It comes with a test program that detects and points out any problems with hardware configuration, interrupt line, or DMA channel. And if trouble appears, alternate jumper settings in all three categories are briefly but clearly described in the documentation. The manual also includes an appendix that provides specific answers to common problems.

Trying out Sound Blaster Pro is a treat. It's got great frequency response — that's the difference between listening to a film score on a tinny, muffled AM radio and hearing it on a stereo movie-theater speaker system. The orchestral soundtrack to Origin's Wing Commander is a good example, because it changes mood and melody to match the success of your current battle. Add Sound Blaster Pro to a good VGA screen and a responsive joystick (which you can plug into Sound Blaster Pro's joystick port),



Quick to install and easy to use, Sound Blaster Pro is a winner.

and the illusion of dogfighting aliens in a George Lucas-style film becomes 3-D, symphonic reality.

Another plus is the absence of the annoying background hiss that precedes some sound effects by a few seconds, killing the surprise. Thanks to its lack of audible distortion, machine gunfire and goblin ambushes alike are sudden and convincing with Sound Blaster Pro. This plays to your advantage in a game like SSI's Eye of the Beholder, in which two-channel sound and visual suggestion create the eerie effect of something padding behind a wall to your left, and then crossing softly behind you and over to the right. It'll raise your hackles the way a good television thriller does — but without the commercial interruptions.

Sound Blaster Pro comes with a few games of its own. Nothing fancy — they're mainly for demonstration purposes, but entertaining just the same. A talking parrot mimics your miked comments and occasionally makes irrelevant remarks; touch the keyboard, and it either laughs or tells you to leave it alone.

Dr. Sbaitso is an updated version of the ancient PC psychological favorite Eliza. You type in your problems, and Sbaitso responds with infuriating psychobabble. The comments you make can be heard in Sound Blaster Pro's left external channel, while Sbaitso occupies the right channel.

FM Intelligent Organ turns your keyboard into a stereo device. It can add different instruments, rhythms, harmonies, and even secondary melodies to whatever you choose to play or compose. The program comes with several stored musical files and a special *Learn* mode that's supposed to get you playing in minutes. That's not really the case, but it's great fun nonetheless.

Sound Blaster Pro has several other non-gaming aspects worth checking out. *Sp Pro* is a fine MIDI sequencer that can combine up to 64 musical tracks. *SBTALKER* reads ASCII text files aloud, though you'll never mistake its inflections for HAL, let alone a human. And *MMPlay* lets you use FM music, digitized voice recording, and *.FLI* files to build integrated graphics animation.

In short, Creative Labs' Sound Blaster Pro is a big winner. It's quick to install, easy to use, full-featured, and compatible with Sound Blaster and AdLib files. Signal response is excellent. And don't forget about the parrot. While everybody else has silent fish swimming across their terminal screens, you can be first on your block to offer a talkative, smart-aleck bird.

Creative Labs, 2050 Duane Avenue, Santa Clara, CA 95054, (408) 986-1461; IBM PC or compatible; 512K RAM; DOS 2.0 or higher; CGA, EGA, VGA, MCGA; EGA or VGA recommended; $299.95

MARTIAN DREAMS

By Wayne Kawamoto

Close encounters with Martians — a.k.a. aliens with UFOs in tow — are as common in the supermarket tabloids as Elvis sightings and head transplants. Life on the Red Planet has even been spelled out in such serious literature as Ray Bradbury's *The Martian Chronicles* and C.S. Lewis' *Out of the Silent Planet*. The prospect of life on Mars — whether the once-common hope for intelligent life or the current dim desire for some simple fungus growing under rocks — has always intrigued us.

Now, Origin's Martian Dreams asks for a leap of faith, and posits life on the fourth planet. It stretches even further, trapping the leading thinkers and celebrities from the Victorian era on the planet before asking you to head into space on a grand rescue mission.

The premise works. Martian Dreams

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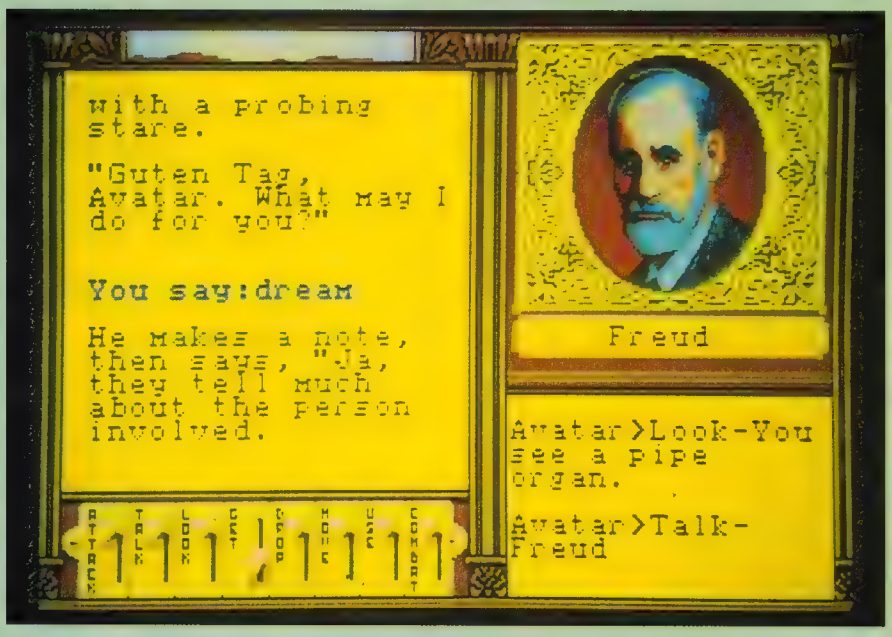
is a first-rate role-playing game with an intriguing story line, an easy-to-use interface, and outstanding graphics and sound.

Boom!

The setting is the 1893 World Columbian Exposition in Chicago. During a demonstration, an enormous space cannon, built to shoot a spaceship to Mars, discharges accidentally, sending an elite group of the period's celebrities and thinkers to the planet. You're asked to rescue them, so you begin your quest in search of adventure, generating characters, Martian Dreams sports Sigmund Freud, with his clipboard in hand. Freud asks your character questions and lends his probing psychoanalysis.

As in Ultima, you find yourself and your loyal team immersed in a distinctly different and expansive world. You'll visit detailed locales, explore caves and settlements, acquire objects, solve puzzles, and best of all, meet and talk with interesting characters based on famous personalities.

You can chat with Thomas Edison, Madame Curie, H.G. Wells, Sarah Bernhardt, Andrew Carnegie, and William Randolph Hearst, among many other historical celebrities. If you don't know Grigori Yefimovich Rasputin from Lord British, you will after playing Martian Dreams. When you talk with a character, his or her image appears on screen. Simply put, Martian Dreams offers some of the best characterizations in a computer game.


with a probing stare.
"Guten Tag, Avatar. What may I do for you?"
You say:dream
He makes a note, then says, "Ja, they tell much about the person involved.
Freud
Avatar>Look-You see a pipe organ.
Avatar>Talk-Freud
ATTACK TALK LOOK GET DROP MAGIC USE COMBAT

Travel to Mars, fight the life forms, and save the likes of Sigmund Freud — all in Martian Dreams.

honor, and experience points.

Martian Dreams features exquisite graphics throughout. The opening movie-like introduction is particularly lavish, and the cinematic devices — a *Fantasia*-inspired orchestra at the beginning and color photos that fade to black-and-white to evoke the past — are splendid.

The interface, taken from the popular and proven Ultima system, is easy to use. With a mouse it's unbeatable. Virtually any command, from getting and using objects to combat, can be carried out without taking your hand off the mouse.

Instead of an Ultima-like gypsy

But where would a role-playing game be without combat? Not only is there life on Mars, but this life attacks. The indigenous life forms include such enticing figments of someone's imagination as *plantimals* (animals that grow from seeds), and others with names like *ammonoids*, *airsquids*, and *oxyleeches*.

Dreams and subconscious thoughts are cerebral themes that permeate the entire game and play an important role. Every time you set your party down to rest, they dream. Eat some berries and you'll obtain extraordinary mental powers. You can even experiment with mysterious dream machines.

No Wimp Computer Need Apply

Unlike the 1990s movie *Total Recall*, which also deals with Mars and dreams, Martian Dreams' plot is intelligent and worthy of a science-fiction novel. This game creates a believable software universe complete with its own physical laws.

Unfortunately, you can save only one position per game. A big investment in play time can disappear with a single mistake.

And the hardware requirements are steep. To run VGA, you need a full 570K of free RAM. Add more RAM if you want to use a mouse. If you want to hear the soundtrack, you'll need expanded memory (and a sound board, of course). At the least you'll have to clean your AUTOEXEC.BAT of TSRs to bring Martian Dreams alive. Players with petite hard-disk drives should note that this program occupies more than 5 megabytes of storage space. And you thought running Microsoft Windows was tough!

All the world's a stage, and in Martian Dreams, that software world is Mars. Whimsical, intelligent, in-depth, and compelling, Martian Dreams is definitely worth the trip, even if that trip starts in the barrel of a gun.

Origin Systems, P.O. Box 161750, Austin, TX 78716, (800) 999-4939; IBM PC or compatibles, 10 MHz or faster recommended; 640K RAM (plus 256K expanded memory for music); 256-color VGA, MCGA, EGA; supports AdLib, Roland, Sound Blaster sound boards; mouse recommended; $59.95

OVERLORD

By Neil Shapiro

Overlord's learning curve is steep, but mastering it is well worth your time and energy.

No one said running an interstellar empire would be easy. There you are, a comfortable despot, one day minding your own business, devouring one star system after another. The next you're faced with xenophobic enemies.

Virgin Mastertronic's Overlord, a science-fiction game that pits you against one of four alien races, challenges your skills as planet manager and galactic warlord. With state-of-the-art graphics and a point-and-click interface, Overlord sets you to battling aliens until the fur, scales, exoskeletons, and protoplasm fly. Only by mastering details and following through on strategy can you dominate deep space.

This product is no quick learn: Overlord is one of the PC's most challenging strategic games.

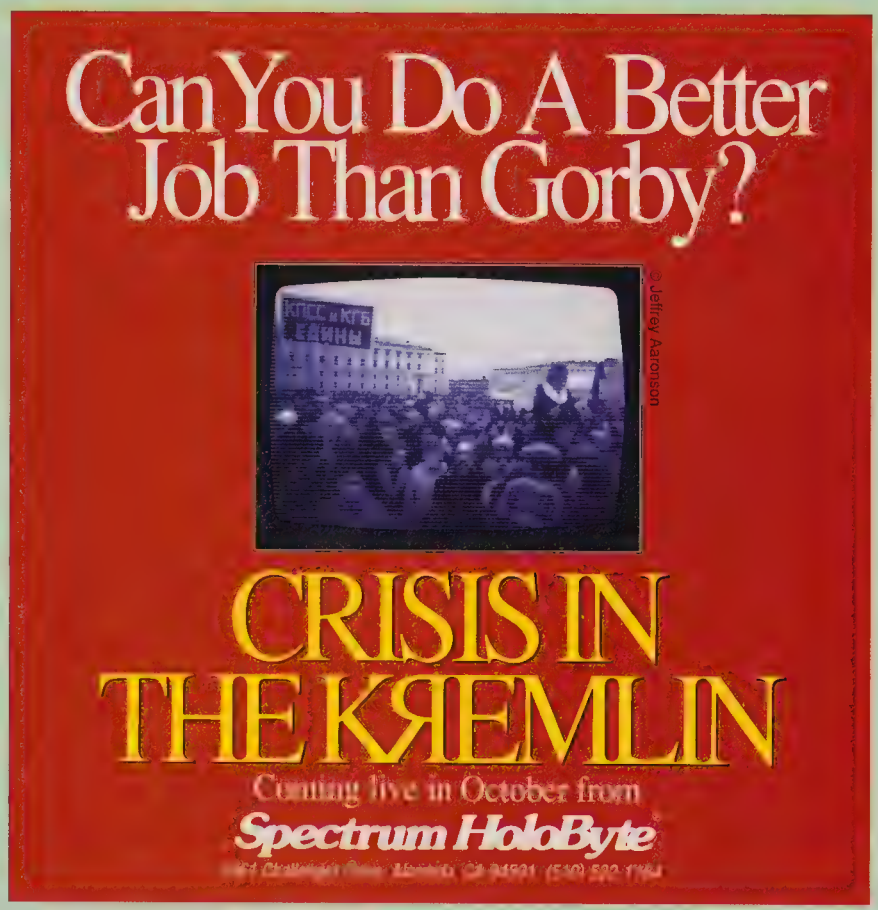
The Challenge

You play Overlord on a series of interconnected screens, all governed by a mouse-driven interface that requires no typing. More complex than intuitive, the interface integrates the game's many different facets of play into one challenging whole. The operative word here is *challenge* — keep it in mind when you consider Overlord, for it's the best bottom-line description of game play.

You can't forget anything. First you format a lifeless world with your *Atmosphere Processor*, which you buy with your tax money. Once bought, it appears in a docking bay on your starbase. You must then switch to a *Navigation* screen, where you can launch your processor into orbit. From orbit you direct it to the world where it's needed. Devices such as solar-energy satellites you'll want to keep in orbit around a planet once they arrive. Other devices, such as horticultural and mining stations, you'll have to bring down from orbit and land on the planet.

You must also crew the various stations by going to a special personnel screen. Here you can load crew, civilians, and colonists into your various vessels and stations, as well as take care of such tasks as fueling ships.

Of course, you'll want to recruit an army to defend your gains and expand your empire. That requires buying battle cruisers, then drafting, equipping, and training soldiers.



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The interesting thing about Overlord, and something you must work with if you're to succeed, is how all this comes together. Everything, every tiny decision in the game, is related to everything else.

Your beginning starbase has a population that you can tax to raise money. But overtaxation limits population growth. As a balance, you can use some of your tax revenue to buy and operate such things as the energy, horticultural, and mining stations. Meanwhile, drafting soldiers lowers the civilian population. Equipping them, depending on the defensive and offensive weaponry you choose, also eats into your funds. And training takes time.

But if you don't keep expanding, your empire stagnates. All this is made even more challenging (there's that word again) because the computer opponent is never just a walkover. Depending on the alien race, your enemy ranges from the hard-to-beat to the really impossible. Even though the manual indicates that the Wotoks are pushovers, it's certainly not apparent during game play.

Tough Interface

What gives Overlord such a unique and distinctive feel are its interface and its graphics images. The latter are generally excellent. From the changing expression on the typical soldier's face as you raise and lower the aggression level of your troops to the bar graphs that show your fuel situation on every world, these are graphics screens that not only inform, but entertain, too.

But getting to those graphics images isn't always fun. The Overlord interface is a screen chase. You go to one screen to implement policies, then go to the next screen, the next, and the next. And on and on. It's not completely obvious which screens follow which, though the documentation's tutorial helps.

Even so, Overlord sports one of the hardest-to-learn iconic interfaces in gaming. Only after you've learned how to actually operate the game can you find Overlord's fun. And it *is* fun to play.

Overlord sets up some high interface hurdles that once leaped, deliver detailed science-fiction strategy.

Virgin Mastertronic, 18001 Cowan Street, Suite A, Irvine, CA 92714, (714) 833-8710; IBM PC or compatible; 512K RAM (CGA, EGA, Tandy 16-color), 640K RAM (VGA); CGA, EGA, VGA, Tandy 16-color; supports AdLib, Roland, Sound Blaster sound boards, Tandy sound; mouse optional but recommended strongly; $49.99

CASTLES

By Carol S. Holzberg

Oh, the life of a king or queen — peasants to tax, alliances to forge, wars to fight, castles to build.

Castles, an entertaining simulation that transforms your PC screen into a reproduction of the 13th-century Welsh countryside, brings the pageantry of the period to life. Beautifully illustrated 256-color VGA graphics, a stirring musical score, and realistic audio effects combine to transport you back to the Middle Ages.

As king (or queen) of Albion, you employ artisans, smiths, diggers, carpenters, and other craftsmen to build castles in strategic locations along the northern frontier of your kingdom. To succeed as a ruler, your castle must withstand attacks by rebellious Celts, dragons, ogres, and wizards. If you subjugate your enemies, you live long and prosper. If you alienate your workers with meager wages, hire an insufficient army to defend your castle walls, or fail to feed your people, your reign ends abruptly in disgrace.

Resembling the popular SimCity in the way it lets you build, create, and manage an electronic reality, Castles creates complex worlds and asks you to juggle dozens of details — so many, in fact, that some players may find things tedious.

Castle Architect

At its most basic, Castles lets you take the reins as master castle architect. Much of the early phases of any session are occupied with selecting a site, then putting laborers to work.

You're not limited to the shape and size of your structure, though the building blocks — walls, towers, and gates — come in standard sizes. You hire, then allocate several different types of workers — masons are the most important — to various parts of the structure, then set them at it. As you watch, they swarm over the screen, raising walls and finishing off towers. As manager of these micromen, you must shift their attentions to new sections as walls are completed, hire more workers to speed up the process, and raise wages if you're to keep them happy and productive.

Controlling this work force isn't always easy, for you have to learn your way around an awkward interface. Control is relatively easy with a mouse, but Castles is more difficult if you opt to play with either keyboard or joystick. Arrow keys on the numeric keypad move the cursor, for example, but conventional keyboard cursor keys don't. Pressing *Enter* won't register a selection, but pressing the *X* key or the spacebar will.

Six submenu screens handle everything from castle construction and labor relations to taxation and military matters. Like any involved game, Castles also lets you save a game in progress for later play, or quit to DOS.

Defender of the Crown

Not everything goes as planned, especially in something as grand as creating a castle. Scaffolds and walls

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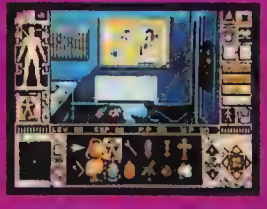

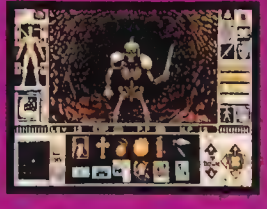

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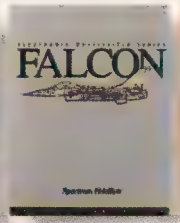

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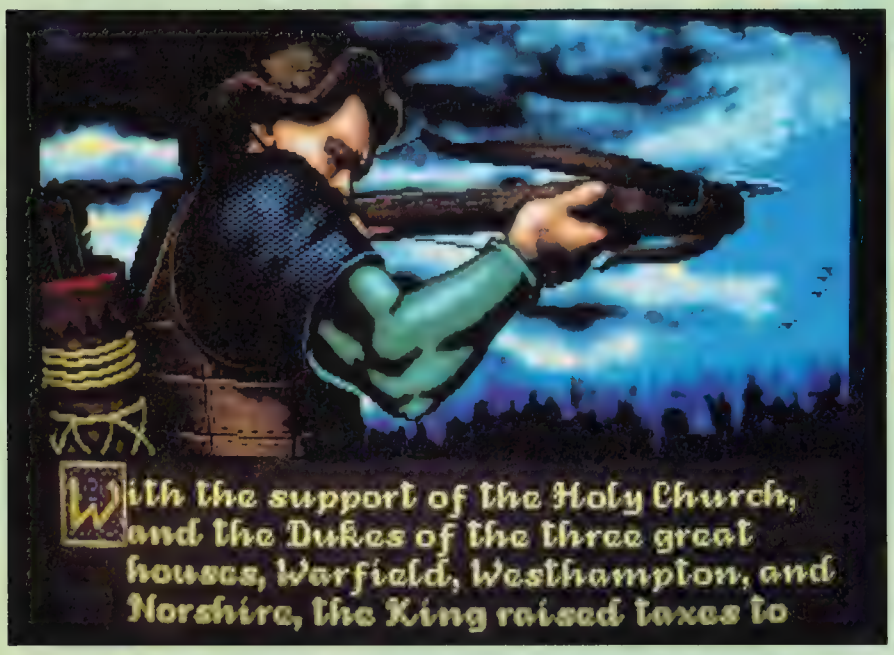
collapse, killing workers. Winter comes and slows down work.

But Castles isn't simply a building program. Extraneous events intervene to draw your attention. Inept noblemen lose battles on the frontier, while valued allies turn traitor and wage rebellions.


With the support of the Holy Church, and the Dukes of the three great houses, Warfield, Westhampton, and Norshire, the King raised taxes to

Defending your domain is the key to success in Castles.

You make decisions based on messages you receive on screen. Well-meaning advisers may lead you astray. Fighting on the frontier will be a constant financial drain. And your foolish son gets into all sorts of trouble.

Building a castle complex, planning adequate defenses, keeping storage rooms filled with food and supplies for the harsh winter months so that your workers and soldiers don't desert to greener pastures — all these activities deplete the royal treasury. You raise funds by levying taxes at one of four taxation rates, ranging from generous to tyrannical. Hike the tax rate too often and you risk rebellion from angry peasants, as well as disapproval from the Holy Church and your loyal noble lords.

But it's castle defense that holds the key to success in this simulation. You must hire archers and infantry to defend castle walls and gates. Be sure to engage sufficient troops well in advance of any attack, preferably immediately after you've started construction, for once an impending battle is announced, you won't have enough time to hire, then deploy your men.

Quickly place your soldiers around the castle ramparts — or if it's not finished, outside its walls — when you receive word of an attack. If you tarry, the invaders may overrun and destroy your castle.

Direct your troops to fire on the aggressors. When your soldiers quash sufficient numbers of enemy troops, you emerge victorious. If you lose too many soldiers in battle, or large portions of the castle get destroyed, the game ends in defeat.

In Days of Old

Castles is no kid's toy (though it conceivably has some applications as a classroom teaching tool in the middle grades). This is more a simulation than a game.

Read the documentation if you want to win. While the manual lacks an index, it nonetheless provides detailed operating instructions, a tutorial guide to castle building, and humorous commentary on the medieval period of European history. There's even a bibliography of suggested supplemental readings.

Its awkward interface and sometimes tedious details notwithstanding, Castles is a unique program that attempts to involve you on several levels: as architect, as commander, and as ruler. To make it in the Middle Ages, you've got to do well at all three occupations.

For anyone who really believes that one's home is one's castle, Castles is a charmer.

Interplay Productions, 3710 South Susan, Suite 100, Santa Ana, CA 92704, (714) 549-2411; IBM PC or compatible; 443K to 555K RAM; DOS 2.1 or later; CGA, EGA, Tandy 16-color, VGA, MCGA (256-color); supports AdLib, Sound Blaster, Innovation, Roland sound boards, Tandy sound; mouse recommended; off-disk copy protection; $59.95

HEADLINE HARRY AND THE GREAT PAPER RACE

By Cynthia E. Field

Inquiring minds want to know. No, this is no scandal-sheet simulator, but instead a rousing learning adventure that's truly fit for the whole family.

You and your kids can travel around the country without leaving the comfort of your chair as you hunt down facts and dig up stories in Davidson's Headline Harry and the Great Paper Race. Along the way, you'll absorb U.S. geography, history, and culture and guffaw at clever one-liners and imaginative storylines.

Davidson's debut into the lucrative learning-adventure market is not only impressive, but fun, too.

XF5700 MANTIS
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Three years ago, giant insect-like creatures from beyond our solar system ambushed Earth. Millions were wiped out in a surprise attack. Now the creatures are reproducing inside human bodies, destroying the human race. All because we lacked the firepower and technology. Now that's changed.

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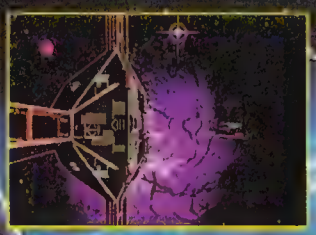
Test the Mantis. There's just one catch. You're going to take it right into heavy combat against the deadliest enemy mankind has ever known.

That's it, men. Scramble your Fighters. And let's be careful up there.



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Tools of the Trade

Harry starts you out as a cub reporter at his newspaper, the *U.S. Daily Star*. Your beat: New York, the Northwest, and the South-Central part of the United States. When you succeed in collecting the who-what-when-where-why for each lead story in these locales, Harry rewards you with assignments in others. Ultimately, *Star* reporters track down the most challenging stories — in New England and Alaska — in an attempt to put Marvin Muckraker, the editor of the *Diabolical Daily*, out of business for good.

Get the scoop in Headline Harry and the Great Paper Race.

Harry gives you plenty of research tools, conveniently organized in a reporter's Control Panel displayed on screen. Click on the *Reference* icon (the program supports a mouse as well as a keyboard) to read information about events from the recent past, tune the *Radio* for clues about the year you're studying, or listen to the *Tape* for authentic quotes from event participants. Pick up the *Phone* to call Headline Harry, editorial assistant Lazar Slate, regional expert Dr. Know, or your mom. Fly to a destination city on your itinerary to interview people in restaurants, bookstores, museums — even on the playground or at the bus stop. Your taxi driver usually offers free advice, too.

Collecting information by trekking around the country and chatting with the locals sounds pretty straightforward. Don't believe it. A sleazebag reporter from the *Diabolical Daily* tries to scoop you by paying off sources or even frightening your taxi driver with voodoo. Occasionally a *Diabolical* reporter is careless, though; you may find Ruth Liz Tactics' daytimer in a New York City museum, for instance. You can gain a few extra hours to deadline by squirreling lost objects into your briefcase.

Headline Harry's biggest challenge comes in sorting the wheat — facts about the lead story — from the chaff-like distractions. If you think you've deciphered the correct lead event, for example, type a word or a short descriptive phrase into the *Event* box in your *Notebook*. The same goes for *Year*, *Date*, *Place*, *Key People*, and *Key Words*. If you guess right, a box's label fills with asterisks to let you know you're on the right track.

When you collect all pertinent information (more is required at higher difficulty levels), file your story, then devise and type a convincing headline. The program generates a well-written story about the event automatically. You can even read or print the story. Not only is it fun to see how the facts you collected fit together, but reading good prose can help you become a better writer. You can replay the same game — with the same stories and clues — until you win.

If a *Diabolical Daily* reporter beats you to the punch (that is, you run out of time) be sure to read his or her hilariously fractured rendition of the real event. One lead story, for instance, focused on the 1984 summer Olympics, while distracting stories revolved around Rutan and Yeager's record-setting plane trip around the world and Jaime Escalante's work with inner-city high-school kids. The *Diabolical* reporter (and that's stretching the term) Hood Wink wrote an imaginative story titled "Plane Sets Olympic Calculus Record."

Déjà Vu?

Comparisons between Headline Harry and Broderbund's Carmen Sandiego phenomenon are natural. After all, both Carmen and Harry can help youngsters develop problem-solving expertise as the kids acquire useful knowledge. Both involve maps, travel, and research. But Headline Harry and the Great Paper Race is more educational and more entertaining.

When you play a Carmen Sandiego game, it's altogether too tempting to zoom past anything not directly related to a villain's whereabouts. Though you may nab the criminal and win the game, it's easy to avoid any real learning. In contrast, Headline Harry — which focuses on actual events — demands that you piece together real facts to develop a story. In short, you can't cut corners with Harry and expect to win. Moreover, true/false challenges randomly pop up to quiz you about geographical, historical, and cultural facts. Each correct answer extends your deadline.

For once you don't have to be skeptical about a program's suggested age range (10 to adult). Sure, kids will enjoy this Davidson charmer, but Boomers will, too, thanks to its 1950-to-1990 datelines. Consider events in your lifetime — Kent State, the moon

landing, Elvis' joining the Army — and you understand Headline Harry's ageless appeal.

Headline Harry's tabloid-like manual brings to mind the scandal sheets at supermarket checkouts. A "Dear Gabby" advice column provides some game-playing strategies, and "Diabolical Personalities in the News" features profiles of *Diabolical Daily* staff members such as Otto Context ("News is like pizza: the cheesier, the better!") and Miss Quote, whose reporter's notebook is said to be her actual "make-up kit." Clever humor is as abundant in the documentation as it is in the game itself.

In a more serious vein, the well-indexed manual clearly explains the program's simple hard-disk-drive installation, and even the procedure for later removal. I'm betting that won't be soon.

Davidson & Associates, P.O. Box 2961, Torrance, CA 90509, (800) 545-7677; IBM PC or compatible; 512K RAM (16-color), 640K RAM (256-color); DOS 2.1 or later; Hercules, CGA, EGA, VGA, MCGA, Tandy 16-color (16-color); VGA, MCGA (256-color); supports AdLib, Sound Blaster sound boards, Tandy, PS/1 sound; $49.95 (16-color), $59.95 (256-color)

ARACHNOPHOBIA

By Lafe Low

A vicious killer has invaded the sleepy town of Canaima. He's an eight-legged creature with a bad attitude, and he's not alone.

Based on the popular spiderfest movie of last year, Arachnophobia boosts the minor character of Delbert McClintock — arachnid-abatement technician extraordinaire — into a starring software role. Spiders are everywhere — on the floor, on the ceiling, in every room of every house in town — so you've got your work cut out for you.

It's all great fun, and though no arcade classic, Arachnophobia is a cute tie-in with the movie.

Eeek! Spiders!

You come loaded for spiders. As Delbert, you have the tools of the extermination trade at hand to combat the eight-legged menace. You have your combat boots — after all, they're only bugs — for some simple spider stepping. But when things get sticky, turn on the toxic smog. One blast sends a soldier spider sizzling.

You also have bug bombs, which zap every spider in a room. If you get in a jam, drop a bomb and you're on your way. You start off with two, and get an extra every time you eradicate the arachnids from a house.

The enemy comes in all flavors. Jumpers leap when you approach, virtually ensuring a miss with your toxic smog blaster and giving them a chance to drop on your head. Aggressive soldiers crawl toward you to attack, cowardly spiders crawl away but attack when they're cornered.

Black-and-yellow queen spiders separate the extermination men from the boys in Arachnophobia. You'll find them when you blow up the spider-egg sack that's somewhere in every house. You want to find the queen spiders — in fact, you *need* to find them. That's why you have the bugometer, which points toward the queen after you destroy each sack.

Take That, You Bug!

Take care as you move from room to room. Occasionally, a spider lies in wait right at the door. You should also use caution when walking past something on the floor, such as a beach ball or a radio: There may be a spider just waiting for you. If you have

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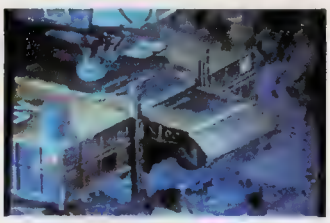

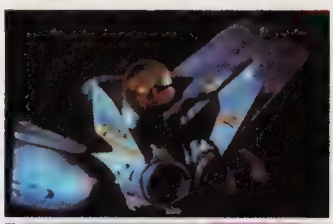

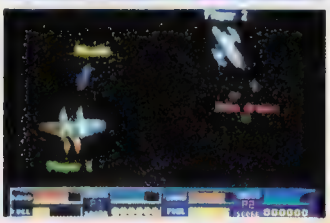

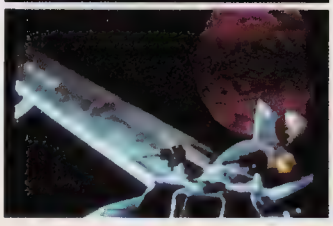

10 MEGABYTES

DIGITIZED SOUNDS

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Can you survive?

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enough spray left, give a blast before walking through. Your spray can gets recharged after you leave a house, so if you run out in the middle of a job, you can always head back to the truck for more. You'll also find aerosol cans and matches from time to time — pick them up. You can combine them to toast an entire egg sack and the fiercest of spiders, even the dreaded queen.

Delbert's tough. You can survive up to four bites from the soldier spiders. Every time you're bitten, Delbert's picture at the bottom of the screen grows more haggard. Fortunately, you can bring back Del's smile with a first-aid kit; most houses have one somewhere.

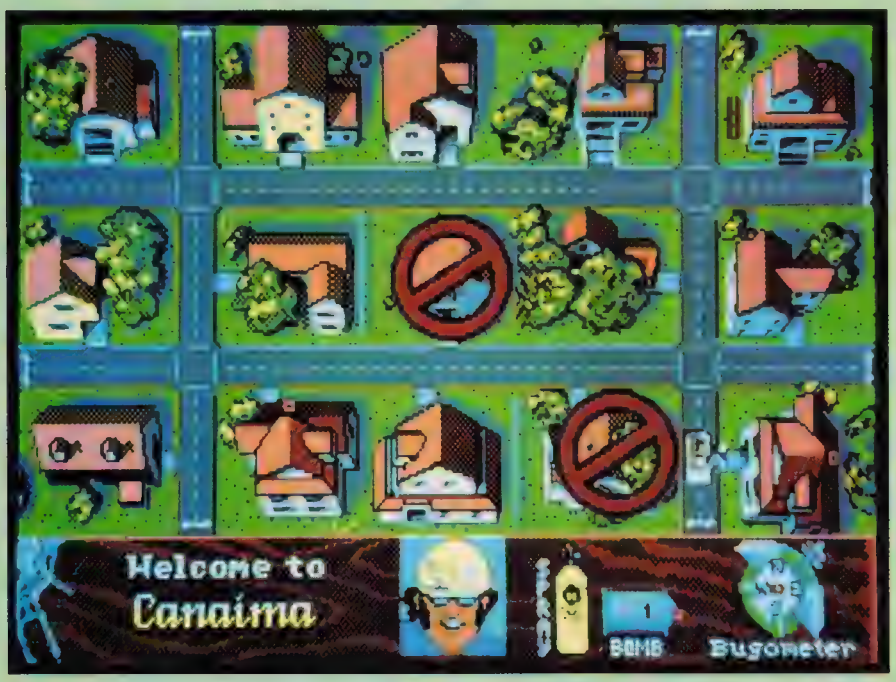
When you're tangling with a queen or a South American spider, you can't be as stoic. Two bites from a queen do you in, while only one bite from a South American arachnid sends you to an early grave.

Disney's Sound Source definitely enhances the arachnid experience. Without it, Delbert moves silently from room to room spraying spiders with a sound that resembles a mechanical sneeze. Connect a Sound Source and you hear his every footstep, as well as a delightful sizzle every time a spider meets an untimely demise.

You'll also be treated to Delbert's effusive commentary from house to house. He'll occasionally chortle "Yep, I'm bad," or "Another satisfied customer" after cleaning out a house.

Arachnophobia is an enjoyable game. Though you might expect that quick reflexes would keep you alive, the game really requires patience. If you're careful and take your time, you can clear out an entire town without a single bite. The soldier spiders just aren't that fast. And even if the queens have you high-stepping, there's only one per town.

If you didn't see the movie, Arachnophobia comes packaged with a novelization of the film, enough to give you a bit of background on the insect plague. Not that an arcade game like this needs more than the most transparent of settings. Not that you need a reason to stomp on spiders. Not after a stint or two as Delbert McClintock.



Step on them, spray them, or bomb them — just get rid of the spiders in Arachnophobia.

Walt Disney Computer Software, 500 South Buena Vista Street, Burbank, CA 91521, (818) 567-5360; IBM PC or compatible; 512K RAM, 640K required for Tandy; CGA, EGA, VGA, MCGA, Tandy 16-color; supports Sound Source (640K required); off-disk copy protection; $49.95

CHUCK YEAGER'S AIR COMBAT

By Richard Sheffield

I blew up a 109 from 600 yards — my third victory — when I turned around and saw another angling in behind me. Man, I pulled back on my throttle so damned hard I nearly stalled, rolled up and over, and came in behind and under him. I was directly underneath the guy, less than 50 feet, and I opened up that 109 as if it were a can of Spam.

That's how Chuck Yeager described one of his exploits over Germany in World War II. And that's what Chuck Yeager's Air Combat is all about: gut-twisting, sweaty-palmed, ace-in-a-day, furball dogfights. No doubt about it, Air Combat delivers.

Dogfight Smorgasbord

Rather than base this fly-and-fight simulation around only one plane or historical period, Air Combat revolves around the experiences of Chuck Yeager, ace fighter pilot and first man to crack the sound barrier. Yeager flew all the hottest fighters, and watched air combat evolve from piston engines to jets to fire-and-forget missiles. With this game, so can you.

Technically, Air Combat has all the bells and whistles you'd expect from a state-of-the-art flight simulator: multiple internal and external views, a slick VCR-style mission recorder, sound-card support, a point-and-click interface, and great VGA filled-polygon graphics with bit-mapped explosions. It's all well done, but nothing earth-shaking, though the animation-frame refresh rate is nearly motion-picture smooth even on a 10-megahertz-equipped PC.

It's in concept and design that Air Combat shines. You get to fly through three periods of aerial combat, and

Fly through three periods of warfare in the skies in Chuck Yeager's Air Combat.

in the process experience firsthand the evolution of aircraft technology. Historical missions cover classic confrontations in each era: P-51D Mustangs versus Messerschmitt 109s in World War II, F-86 Sabres versus MiG-15s over Korea, and F-4E Phantoms against MiG-21s over Vietnam. You can do Yeager one better, for Air Combat lets you fly for either side.

But the most interesting dogfights were during those transitional periods when the playing field was definitely uneven. P-51 Mustang pilots who went head to head with jet-powered Messerschmitt 262s during the closing days of World War II, and who then fought MiG-15s over Korea, knew what "pucker factor" was all about. These situations are included in the historical missions as well. If you're even more adventurous, you can quickly set up combat between any planes of any era. Want to take on two F-4s in a Messerschmitt 262? No problem.

Chuck Yeager's Air Combat features a user interface geared more toward fun and learning than technical nit-picking. And the artificial intelligence of the enemy pilots is quite good — no circling drones waiting to be blown up here. Luckily, you can set the experience level of the enemy pilots from amateur to expert. You can also access several on-screen windows to display information on enemy maneuvers and locations, or to get advice on tactics from Yeager himself. When the General pops up and tells you to break right, you'd better listen!

But Air Combat doesn't have everything. Although it includes a campaign mode, it's really nothing more than playing the historical missions back to back. A modem-to-modem or direct head-to-head combat option would be welcome. And rudder keys would help you maneuver in certain situations. The game is copy protected, but the manual look-ups are quick and you have to do it only once per session.

Chuck Yeager's Air Combat places a premium on skill and combat savvy. It's all explained in the excellent documentation. Master aerial combat in all three eras and you can proudly say that you, too, have the right stuff.

Electronic Arts, 1820 Gateway Drive, San Mateo, CA 94404, (415) 571-7171; IBM PC or compatible, 10 MHz 286 or faster recommended; 640K RAM; CGA, EGA, MCGA, VGA; supports AdLib, CMS, Covox Speech Thing, Tandy DAC, Sound Blaster sound boards; off-disk copy protection; $59.95

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ROTOX

By Lafe Low

Get ready to lose some sleep. Rotox is one of those arcade games that almost force you to play just one more round.

As a cyborg Robocop-like creature, you cavort on ten increasingly difficult levels, each with nine areas. Rotox puts creatures in your way that you must vaporize before advancing to the next level. Sound simple enough? Yeah, sure it does.

Variety spices up the arcade action in Rotox.

You begin armed with an ordinary 1MW Pulse Laser. Any cyborg worth his weight in fibroplastic has one of those. Once you've cleared certain zones of certain pests, you'll find additional ordnance, ranging from the 3MW Pulse Laser, which clears out a wide radius of critters, to the KK9 Missile Launcher, which punches through the most stubborn of aliens with a single shot.

To make your job even easier, you'll also run across a jetpack. It'll come in handy when you cross one of the many zig-zagging pathways in this game. Besides clearing each zone and area of nasties, you'll also have to negotiate tricky, and often moving, walkways and ramps. If you don't feel like taking a fall, fire up the jetpack and float across. Keep an eye on your fuel, though. You don't want to be caught with nothing under your feet and no *oomph* in your jetpack.

When you fall off the edge of the test area's platforms or take enough blaster hits, you begin again in the same zone in that area. You start with full energy, but if you fall off the edge or exhaust your energy too often, the game's over.

Stepping off the edge or running out of energy forces you to discard your extra equipment, everything from your jetpack and high-octane laser to your missile launcher. You're history when you take the plunge. Don't despair, though, because you can find more later.

Arcade Action and More

Rotox's action may be straight out of the arcade formula, but it includes enough spicy variations to make it worth your time. An overhead view of the action, complete with a 360-degree rotating perspective, spins you around as fast as if you were turning your head. Do that while Rotox moves and you get the feel of motion — scrolling is smooth and seamless.

Several status screens surround your main view, showing your energy level and charged weapons, and pinpointing nearby enemies on a small radar screen. Use the radar to locate any items that happen to be lying around, such as weapons or the jetpack.

Jetpack-fuel and running-score indicators flesh out the status screens. But the most important is the zone-completion grid, which changes color as each of the nine zones in an area is cleared.

As you empty an area of hostiles, you're transported suddenly to the next area. Keep your finger on the trigger — more often than not, you'll be staring an alien in the face when you land.

Each Rotox level positions the same bugs in the same places. Though this may seem tiresome, you can use it to your advantage. You'll need every reflex you can muster to get Rotox through each level intact. Be patient, be careful, and you may — just may — make it.

You'll find out quickly how best to exterminate the pests indigenous to each zone. Destroy with care, stay cautious, and try not to make stupid mistakes, such as stepping off the edge or taking too many unnecessary blaster hits. Each one by itself won't crush you, but their cumulative effect will shorten your Rotox time considerably.

Rotox sports graphics as good as you'll see in any PC arcade game. Blaster hits and explosions are delightfully colorful, and no matter how much is happening on screen at one time, the action never slows down.

Undoubtedly, you'll have mixed emotions about Rotox. Sure, you love it; sure, it's a blast (literally) to play. But when you can't turn off the PC, when you scream "just one more time!" you may wish you'd never seen it. ❑

U.S. Gold, 550 South Winchester Boulevard, Suite 200, San Jose, CA 95128, (408) 985-1700; IBM PC or compatible; 512K RAM; CGA, EGA, VGA (16-color); off-disk copy protection; $39.95

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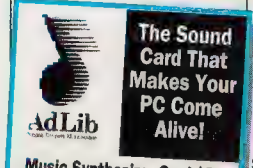

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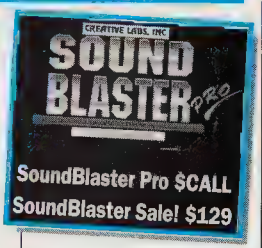

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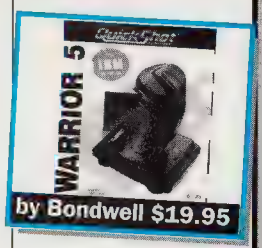

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PLAYING THE GAME

New Worlds Beckon

By Neil Shapiro

You might say that this month's theme is "getting by with a little help from your friends." Whether it's a hint book or a predrawn game map, sometimes good old-fashioned written material is just the kind of assist you need to solve an electronic puzzle or forge ahead into uncharted screen territory.

In-Depth Reading

Remember the early simulation games? It was back in the Stone Age of around 1977 or so when I first sat down to play a game that put the player into a "real life" situation. The game was an old BASIC-language rendition of Hammurabi, and the player was expected to take on the role of the emperor by simplistically allocating grain to his people and the like. You could learn Hammurabi in about five minutes — how times have changed!

Now we have simulation games such as MicroProse's **Railroad Tycoon** and **SimEarth** from Maxis. The level of believability and complexity has increased a few thousandfold, it seems, since that Hammurabi ancestor made his debut. Now such games come with thick manuals, and it can be downright challenging to even get started.

Many gamers shy away from today's complex simulations because they're either not very knowledgeable about what the game is simulating or feel that the subject is too dry and complicated to even bother learning.

A new type of book has come to the rescue. Some people may think of these manuals as hint books, but they're much more than that. They use simulation games as ways for the reader to explore new fields in an exciting, interactive manner.

SimEarth: The Official Strategy Guide, by Rusel DeMaria, is a case in point. It's an exciting tour of all of the many facets of the earth and environmental sciences that SimEarth depends on to evoke an evolving world. It's no dry lecture — DeMaria has included excellent treatises on some of today's problems that SimEarth can help us understand better.

For instance, DeMaria's explanation of the greenhouse effect is probably the most coherent discussion I've read yet about the dangers of fluorocarbon gases. The book's reference section is replete with similar examples — from short essays on overpopulation to equally lucid explanations of "The Ozone Hole" and "Ocean Resources and Ocean Management."

Of course, what makes the information most exciting is that DeMaria places it within the matrix of the game SimEarth. The concept of learning by doing is nothing new, of course — but nowadays we can learn by doing truly outrageous things, such as designing our own planets, thanks to the software arts.

The tutorial sections of the book are also well written. The chapter titled "The Simulations" gives a step-by-step, cookbook approach to learning how to operate SimEarth and its various scenarios. No matter what level of play you enjoy, odds are this book will coax you into stretching past your current limits and will add many extra hours of valuable play to the game itself. And that's really the best recommendation you can give a book like this.

Likewise, ***The Official Guide to Sid Meier's Railroad Tycoon***, by Russel Sipe, will add immeasurably to your enjoyment of the MicroProse simulation of the same name. The reason's simple: As the author himself explains in the introduction, Sipe just likes trains.

Now, me, I hate trains. Or, at least, I thought I did (thanks to seven awful years on the Long Island Railroad commuting lines). But Sipe truly communicates his love for the rails.

For example, the author could have simply — and dryly — presented the idea that building restaurants and hotels along a line increases the income realized from hauling passengers. But Sipe leads into that with a rollicking anecdote about Fred Harvey, who set up a whole string of restaurants along the original Sante Fe railroad line. It seems that besides supplying the Old West with hot meals and good drink, Harvey's waitresses also became one of the main sources for wives in the area.

Another result of Sipe's lifelong love of railroads is a collection of classic articles and stories he's picked up over the years. Reprints from old magazines such as *Scribner's Monthly* and contemporary photos and artwork make the book irresistible — even for an avowedly anti-rail person like me.

Sipe's chapter on "How to Be a *Good* Robber Baron" was of great help once I got into the game itself. Here he shows just how to go about trying to win. While I have yet to make president of the United States myself, I can foresee success at the end of the tunnel (excuse the pun), thanks to Sipes' book.

Both volumes herald a whole new growth area of publishing — books that enhance games. As games become more complex, these are just the right sorts of tools we'll need to get to the heart of an adventure.

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Mapping the Terrain

This month let's also explore some of the inner secrets of the game **BAT**, from UbiSoft Inc.

As many of you have already discovered, BAT represents something of a milestone in role-playing adventures, thanks to an interface that's truly state of the gaming art. Whether you're talking to a character, doing battle, or piloting a DRAG ship, most of BAT's techniques are intuitive.

The one difficulty you may run into is the complexity of the plot and the intricate way in which all BAT's numerous on-screen devices — including the B.O.B., or *Biosdirectional Organic Bioputer*, a depiction of a display panel that's built onto your on-screen arm — must interrelate for you to understand the game at all.

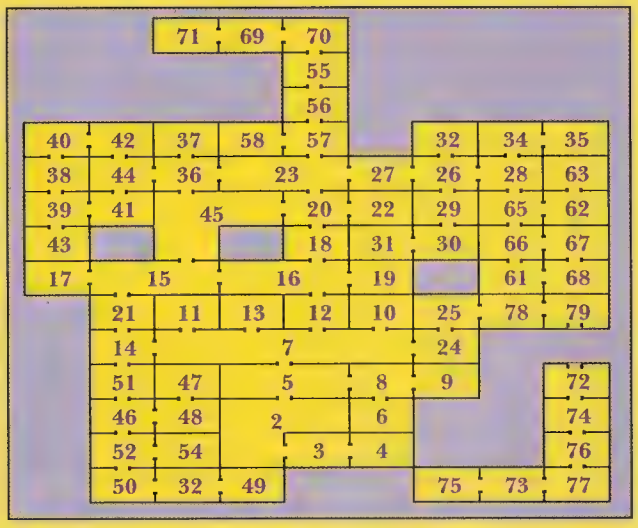
When I played BAT the first time, it was all I could do to just question and explore and to familiarize myself with the B.O.B. The usual problems of mapping and keeping track of where I was "physically" made the beginning of the game quite daunting for me. You'll note that in the accompanying **Figure** I've included a complete map of the city of Terrapolis to help other first-timers get off to a faster start than I did.

I can hear your outraged comments now: "A map is a cheat mechanism, it detracts from game play!" I disagree. The fact of the matter is that BAT is one of the most wonderfully complex simulations I've ever seen — but complex in such a sophisticated way that using a map only enhances your enjoyment.

Many role-playing adventure games count on the complexity of the terrain to make up for a lack of plot, an awkward interface, silly interactions, unbelievable graphics, or some general weakness in another area. But BAT is one of the new generation of role-playing games — with a depth of simulation that approaches the overall complexity of actually living through the adventure it portrays (albeit without the physical danger). In other words, the fun in BAT lies in the adventure itself, not in the mapping.

Even if you play your first game without the map, hold onto it, because I want ➪

Figure. Map of the city of Terrapolis, from the UbiSoft adventure game BAT.



KEY

2 astroport lobby
3 view of astroport restroom
4 view from interior of stall (agent's location at game's start)
5 astroport lobby (entrance to bar)
6 bar (general view)
8 bar (meet the Kradokid)
9 bar (at the bar)
10 fast bed
11 mecafood
12 street
13 change machine (credits into krells)
14 street
15 street (access to pharmacist)
16 intersection
17 pharmacist (buy pills, cures, life points, "general cure" option)
18 street
19 gunsmith (buy weapons and ammunition)
20 intersection
21 street
22 bar
23 pressure-cabin intersection
24 square of Old Building
25 Old Building
26 red-light district (access to game room and nightclub)
27 street
28 street
29 interior of nightclub
30 dance floor
31 dance floor
32 game room
33 hotel reception
34 cinema (tickets)
35 cinema
36 artificial-park square
37 Chinese restaurant
38 gardens
39 gardens
40 gardens
41 gardens
42 fountain gardens
43 Museum of Natural History
44 park lobby
45 intersection
46 police-station square
47 jail
48 police office
49 hotel room
50 hotel square
51 street
52 street (entrance to electronics store)
54 electronics store (buy force field, repair B.O.B.)
55 pressure cabin (location of DRAGs)
56 DRAG rental
57 entrance to pressure cabin (blocked by cop)
58 technician room (location of Registry of Informative Literature, information on Vrangor's Epsilon station)
61 Crisa Kourtakis' face
62 entrance to xifo
63 table inside xifo (where Merigo appears)
65 street
66 entrance to Crisa Kourtakis' tower (guarded by Shirtronic)
67 tower elevator
68 Crisa Kourtakis' room
69 door to Vrangor's lab (with code)
70 Epsilon station dome
71 Vrangor's lab
72 underground city
73 underground city
74 closed door
75 control room
76 underground city
77 underground city
78 highest entrance possible to corridors
79 underground entrance to corridors, access to speed track

The Games: Winter Challenge

"HE HATED THE AUSTRIANS.

THEY WERE FEARLESS, CUNNING AND FAST. FIVE GOLD

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you to try BAT both ways. I think you'll find that playing with the map will let you concentrate more on the interactions and the underlying story.

To me, mapping in BAT when you don't have to is like reading the page numbers while perusing an exciting novel.

And, while you're exploring Terrapolis, keep a few of these extra hints in mind, as well:

- Make certain you meet the BAT agent in the airport restroom; otherwise it's impossible to get into the game.
- The "corridor illness" can ruin your day. Head for the pharmacist's and pick up some pills.
- At the beginning of the game you'll see a force field lying on the ground in the astroport bar. Don't be shy about picking it up and wearing it. Soon enough your enemy Merigo will attack you, and the force field will probably save your life.
- You must fight Merigo and kill him to find the keys to the corridor access door.

Try programming the B.O.B. computer, too. While the included routines are useful, you can add to the game by making up your own multipurpose programs.

For instance, here's one that will translate the game's robot languages while also speeding up your heartbeat so that you can respond faster to an enemy who's after you. It'll even warn you of the extent of your injuries and slow your heartbeat back down if you're hurt:

```
Rhythm
Translate
If (Robot)
    Translate (Robot)
End If
If (Pursued)
    Rhythm
    (Accelerate)
    Warn
End If
If (Injured)
    Rhythm
    (Hibernation)
    Warn
    Warn
    Return
    Display
    ("Injured!")
End If
Restart
```

The B.O.B. language is BASIC-like, and although the manual doesn't go into techniques such as loops and end-if subroutines, anyone already proficient in BASIC will catch right on. Even if you're not sure what you're doing, experiment — you can't bust the B.O.B.

Got any B.O.B. programs of your own to share? Send them in and I'll publish the best ones here. BAT's one heck of a game, and with the map, some hints, and some extra B.O.B. programs, you'll be hooked for good.

Shoot to Kill

Now for a hint from one of our readers, Carlo Rosales Montoya of Banawa Cebu City in Cebu, the Philippines. Carlo's technique in Accolade's **Steel Thunder** game lets him achieve a remarkable one-shot/one-kill ratio.

If you're using the M1A1 Abrams tank or the M1A60 main battle tank, have your gunner identify the target first. If it's a T-80 or a T-62, use armor-piercing shells. If it's one of the lighter tanks, a heat or high-explosive round will do. Then have your gunner target and fire at the enemy with the .30-calibre auxiliary machine gun. (It's important to note whether the target is in range.)

If you think your gunner has a 100 percent chance or the game says "good shot," you're already okay. If not, press F4 to switch on the main gun, and watch your kill results go over 90 percent.

Got a hint you'd like to share, or a technique to enhance a game, or any special clue or gaming strategy? Each month we'll try to publish a selection of the best tips from readers. Send them along to Neil Shapiro, Playing the Game, P.O. Box 520, Bethpage, NY 11714. Thanks, and see you next month. ❑

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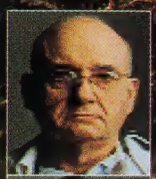

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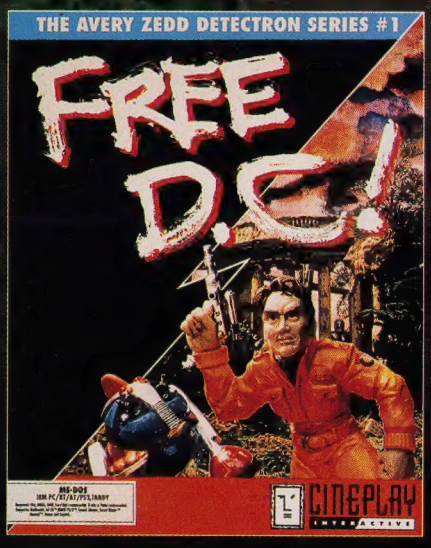

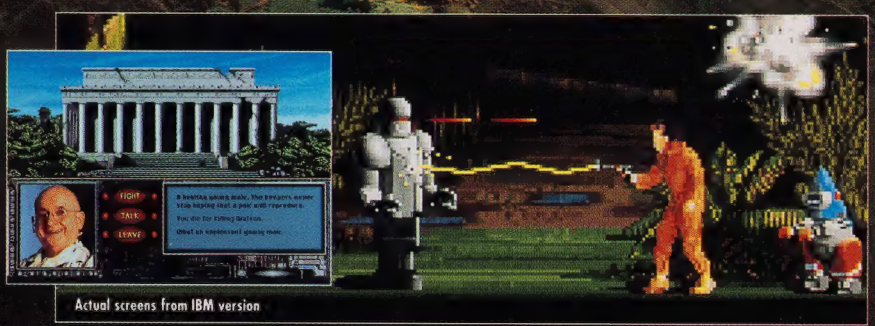

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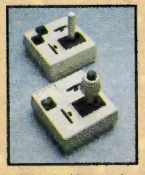

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